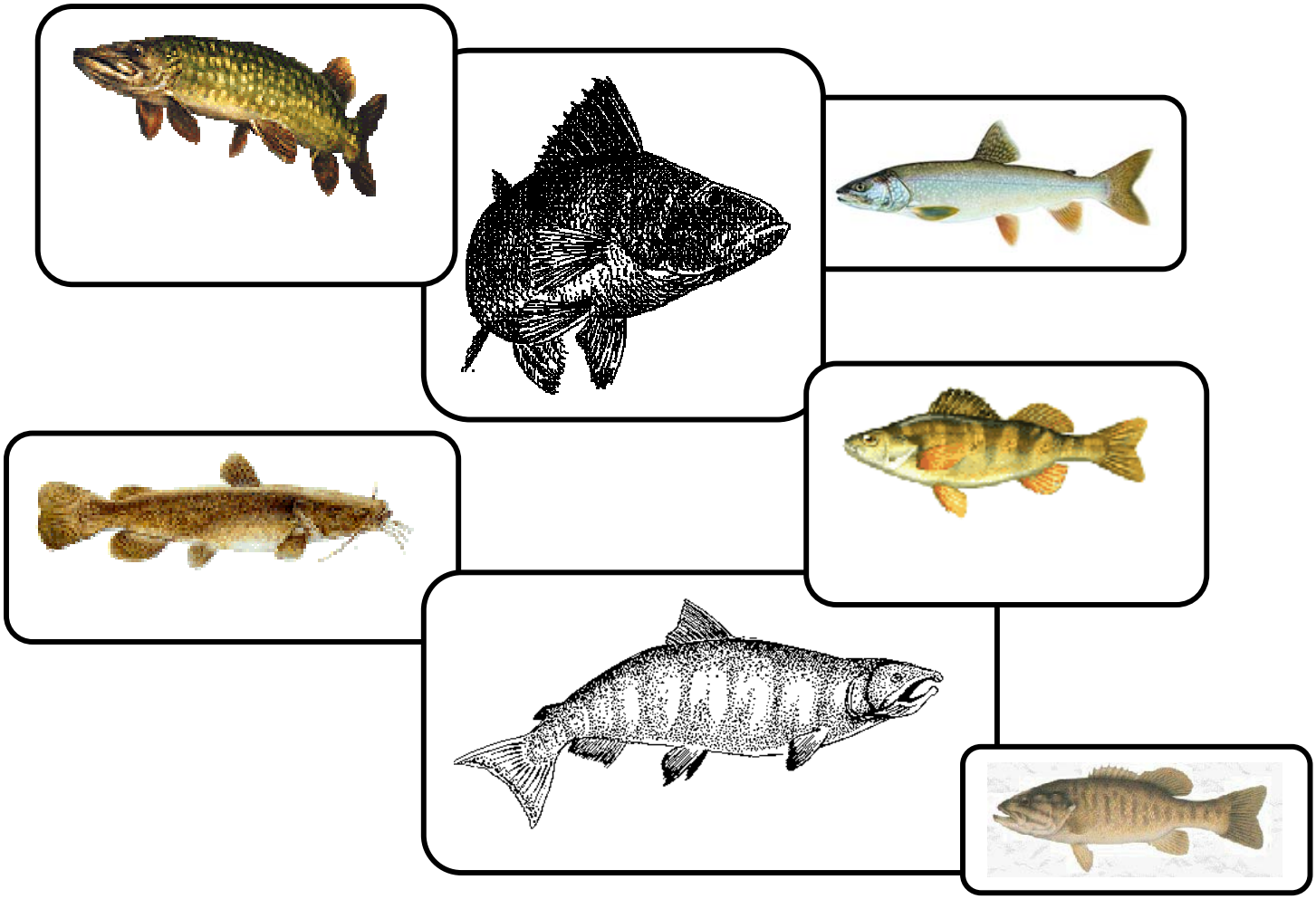
FORT PECK RESERVOIR FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN



Prepared by

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 6

Appeals to this plan may be made to the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission **in writing** by April 8, 2002. Send appeal to:

Attn: FPFMP
MT FW&P Commission
1420 East 6th Ave
Helena MT 59620

FORT PECK RESERVOIR FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN

2002 - 2012

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS
REGION 6
March 2002

Approved: _____
M. Jeff Hagener, Director

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I. SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT PLAN

The major elements of this ten-year Fisheries Management Plan are summarized under the following headings.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Management program for the walleye fishery:

1) Continue to place the major management effort on walleye.

2) Attempt to attain a catch rate of 0.5 fish per hour, angler satisfaction will be measured with lake-wide creel at minimum 3-year interval.

3) Stock a minimum of 2.0 million and up to a maximum of 3.0 million fingerling annually (pre-new hatchery), and up to total of 3.5 to 4.5 million fingerling annually (post-new hatchery). Augment fingerling stocking with fry as conditions and availability allow.

4) Continue the daily limit of 5 fish and 10 fish possession limit.

Management program for sauger fishery:

1) The sauger population in Fort Peck Reservoir is dependent primarily on natural reproduction in the Missouri River upstream, and no stocking is planned or recommended within the Reservoir.

2) Reduce the daily limit to 1 fish and 2 fish in possession until routine sampling shows abundance is improving.

Management program for the smallmouth bass fishery:

1) Continue to maintain a viable smallmouth bass fishery that is primarily sustained by natural reproduction and augmented on a limited basis at specific areas by supplemental stocking.

2) Continue present daily and possession limits of 5 fish.

Management program for the lake trout fishery:

1) Manage the high quality lake trout fishery with a goal of maintaining the average size of fish at, or above, 7 pounds, and an angler catch rate of 0.15 and 0.10 for spring and fall, respectively.

2) Conduct spring and fall creel surveys when possible to monitor catch rate, condition factors, and average size of lake trout. In years when FWP staff cannot creel, attempt volunteer angler creel to obtain catch and harvest numbers.

3) Conduct supplemental stocking of lake trout if future surveys indicate need. Stocked fish will be marked to determine their contribution to the fishery and may also provide a population abundance index.

4) Continue present daily and possession limit of 3 fish, barring any significant decline in present angler catch rates, or extended reservoir drawdown, exceeding 3 years.

Management program for the northern pike fishery:

1) Continue to monitor population abundance and production through annual surveys.

2) Maintain, or slightly increase, populations through natural reproduction and limited stocking. When reservoir levels are not suitable for spawning, 200,000 fingerlings will be stocked annually or 1 million fry depending on hatchery availability.

3) Continue present daily and possession limit of 10 fish.

Management program for the chinook salmon fishery:

1) Maintain the population at, or near, the 1989/1990 levels, and thereby continue to provide the opportunity to catch "trophy sized" fish.

2) Pursue a reliable egg source to help achieve annual stocking of approximately 200,000 fingerlings between 3 and 4 inches or equivalent variations. Numbers of chinook salmon stocked would be contingent on cisco abundance monitored in previous surveys.

3) When sufficient number of chinook spawners are available, take eggs from wild Fort Peck stock and continue rearing fingerlings in reservoir net-pens on annual basis.*

4) Continue working with the Tri-state Salmon Group to maintain and improve the Missouri River chinook salmon population to provide each state's needs with disease-free eggs and sustain disease-free status for resident population.

5) Continue present daily and possession limit of 5 fish.

Management program for the forage fish:

1) Maintain forage fish abundance and diversity by making annual water level recommendations to COE that are favorable for natural reproduction.

2) Monitor forage fish populations to acquire information for future management decisions, such as determining number of game fish species to be stocked.

3) Evaluate hydroacoustic assessments as a tool to monitor cisco population. If it proves to be a useful management tool, pursue acquisition of necessary equipment.

Management program for fish population trends:

1) Continue the present annual program of trap netting, gill netting, beach seining, and spot creel surveys.

2) Secure the funding to do season-long, lake wide, creel surveys a minimum of every three years.

Management program for fishing tournaments:

1) A maximum of 12 open water tournaments per year, mandatory catch and release, will be permitted. Preference will be given to applicants of established or traditional tournaments previously held on Fort Peck.

2) Tournaments will be reviewed on an individual basis, as they have in the past, with social and biological impacts considered as well as a 30-day public review and comment period.

3) All catch and release tournaments with weigh-in type format will be limited to cool weather periods: May - June 15th, or after September 15th.

4) No tournaments will be allowed on holiday weekends such as Memorial Day, 4th of July, or Labor Day.

5) The area or boundaries of tournaments will be kept to a size that will attempt to reduce mortality caused by captured fish being held in live-wells over an inordinate distance and/or over an extended period of time.

6) Only one tournament per day will be permitted to be headquartered out of any marina or boat access area.

7) Work with tournament directors to obtain consistent and standardized catch rate information.

II. INTRODUCTION

Fort Peck Reservoir is formed by a large earth-filled dam located on the Missouri River in the northeastern part of Montana. Completed in 1937, it is the largest body of water in the state, with 240,000 surface acres and 1,500 miles of shoreline at full pool. The reservoir is 130 miles in length and has a maximum depth of 220 feet when full. Administration of all land and water within the executive boundary of the Charles M.

Russell National Wildlife Refuge is shared by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in accordance with Memorandum of Agreement No. DACW 45-9-97-6039. The reservoir is operated by the Corp of Engineers to provide water for power, flood control, irrigation, navigation and recreation.

The Fort Peck Reservoir fishery is managed by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (Department) through the Region 6 Headquarters which is located in Glasgow, approximately 18 miles northwest of the dam. Approximately 50 species of fish occupy the reservoir, most of which are native to the Missouri River system. Sixteen species, mostly game fish, have been introduced to develop sport-fishing opportunities. The reservoir's fishery has become a bright spot on Montana's eastern plains. The reservoir's walleye fishery has been of most interest to resident anglers and in recent years has begun to attract non-residents as well. One ice-fishing tournament and 11 open-water fishing tournaments were permitted by FWP in 2001.

The Department estimates that current fishing use (from March, 1999 through February, 2000) has increased to a level of approximately 112,000 angler days per year which would result in a fishing value for the reservoir of $5,258,888 per year. This information is based on the 1999 Montana Statewide Angling Pressure Report and Warm Water Fishing in Montana: A Contingent Valuation Assessment of Angler Attitudes and Economic Benefits for Selected Waters Statewide, 1991. The economic values have been updated to 1999 dollars using the Consumer Price Indices developed by the federal government.

The Department recognizes that the public is in general much more knowledgeable on resource issues and wants to be involved in decision-making regarding the management of fish and wildlife resources. The Department feels that it must get the public involved early in the planning process to help in selecting a management program rather than simply approving one after the fact. A major goal of the process is to give the public ownership in the management of the resource. The Department has also identified the major fisheries in the State and has initiated a program to develop Fisheries Management Plans for these fisheries. Fort Peck Reservoir falls into this category.

The planning process utilized by the Department involves several stages. The first of these is an in-house scoping phase to initially identify the issues of concern. The next stage is the public scoping phase, which results in a refined statement of issues. This is accomplished by holding public meetings and through use of an Advisory Committee that meets periodically with the Department as the Plan is developed. Management alternatives are then developed by consideration of the public's desires with the Department's technical knowledge of the fishery resource. Next is the draft phase, which involves the preparation of the first draft of the revised Management Plan, the Plan is then released to the public for review and written comment. FWP then reviews public comments and summarizes for review with the Advisory Committee. Considering the public's and the Advisory Committee's input, FWP prepares second draft for public review and comment. Once public comments are reviewed and summarized, FWP considers comments and amends the second draft. The Final draft is written, and submitted to the Director for approval. In the last phase, the FWP Commission reviews

any appeals and the Plan is amended as necessary. The Final Management Plan is published and released to the public.

III. PLAN ADAPTABILITY

The Plan once completed and adopted, will guide fisheries resource management on Fort Peck Reservoir for a ten-year period. An informational meeting will be held annually in Glasgow during February or March to provide the interested public with an update on the present status of the fishery and how existing circumstances may effect short-term management of the fishery. In the event that conditions require a long-term revision or change to a particular component of the Plan during this period, the document may be amended. Any significant changes will be discussed and reviewed with the Fort Peck Fisheries Management Plan Advisory Committee, which will meet annually with FWP fisheries personnel in Glasgow.

A citizen's advisory group will be assembled during the duration of this ten-year plan. The group will be comprised of concerned citizens representing a variety of interests on Fort Peck. The advisory group, chaired by FWP, will monitor implementation of the Fort Peck Management Plan and will hold an annual public meeting to review annual stocking proposals and any significant modifications to this plan.

This plan reflects the public's desire for a significant increase in walleye fingerling stocking over and above the state's current rearing capacities. Along with this enhanced stocking effort, the department must intensify monitoring by various sampling techniques to ensure sustained health and diversity of the aquatic ecosystem. The frequency of lake-wide creels needs to be stepped up to document improvements in angler success and satisfaction. Implementation of a more aggressive management program as requested by the public necessitates additional funding and manpower. Therefore, throughout the Fisheries Management section of this Plan, increased resource needs will be designated with an asterisk (*). A summary of increased resource needs is provided in the appendix.

IV. BACKGROUND ON FORT PECK RESERVOIR AND FISHERY

The Corps of Engineers started construction of Fort Peck Dam in 1933 with completion some seven years later in 1940. Statistics relating to the size of the dam are impressive, as it is the largest embankment dam in the United States with the fifth largest man-made reservoir. The dam is also the sixth largest volume dam in the world, and the largest hydraulic fill dam in the world. The primary purposes of the dam at the time of construction were flood control and improvement of navigation on the Missouri River. Today it is looked at as a multi-purpose project regulated for flood control, navigation, power generation, irrigation, public water supply, fish and wildlife conservation, recreation and improvement of water quality.

In the reservoir's early years, little was recorded regarding the quality of its fishery. Scattered reports from old-timers indicate sauger, perch, crappie, drum, catfish and goldeye comprised the bulk of the fishery. Over the years some sixteen species, mostly

game fish, have been introduced to develop sport-fishing opportunities. Walleyes and northern pike were both introduced in 1951 followed by lake trout in the mid-50s. Smallmouth bass were introduced in 1981 and chinook salmon in 1983. During the 80's new species of forage fish, such as spottail shiners and cisco were introduced.

During the late l950's and early 1960's rising water levels inundated vegetation and produced an outstanding fishery for northern pike, crappie, and yellow perch. Management efforts to maintain this high quality fishery were continued by additional stocking and efforts to obtain suitable water levels. However, this was not successful due to reservoir operations that resulted in variable water levels.

Attempts to improve habitat to enhance the fishery have been undertaken by local sportsman's groups over the years, in the form of spawning fences and Christmas tree reefs. Due to the vastness of the reservoir, very little impact to the fishery has been realized. Cobble or rock spawning reefs have been considered to aid natural reproduction of walleye, but cost is prohibitive. Even if walleye spawning reefs could be constructed, long-term effectiveness is doubtful, due to water level fluctuations and significant siltation in some areas. An artificial structure that may accommodate natural reproduction of walleye on a limited basis, is the breakwater at Fort Peck Marina. It was initially constructed of large rock in 1996, which was too large to be utilized by spawning walleye. However smaller rock of suitable size is scheduled to be placed on the face of breakwater by the Corps of Engineers in the Fall of 2001.

The outstanding and varied sport fishery found in the reservoir today is the result of the success of recent management efforts by the Department. Key to this effort has been an understanding by the Department of the erratic natural reproduction of game fish, which is augmented by stocking. Also important has been the introduction and establishment of new forage fish species, which are less influenced by water level fluctuations than the riverine-type native forage fish. Final evaluation of management success is done by angler surveys, which then allow estimates of catch rates, average size of the fish, and overall angler satisfaction with the fishery.

V. MANAGEMENT AGENCIES AND AUTHORITIES

The following agencies are involved in the management of the Fort Peck Dam and Reservoir. A brief description of their management authorities and activities is provided.

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers was responsible for the original construction of Fort Peck Dam and Reservoir and continues to operate the facility under authority of the Flood Control Act of 1944. Fort Peck is one of six main stem dams on the Missouri River operated by the Corps in accordance with guidelines contained in the Missouri River Master Water Control Manual. In recent years the Manual has come under question on grounds that it does not best meet the needs of the Missouri River basin. Drought conditions within the upper basin during the late 1980's and early 1990's resulted in

substantial drawdown of Fort Peck Reservoir and other upper reservoirs in order to meet navigational and other downstream uses. This affected the fishery and recreational uses of Fort Peck. In response to the drawdown, the Corps extended boat ramps at Fort Peck to maintain recreational use.

In 1989 the Corps initiated a study of the current Water Control Plan as contained in the Master Water Control Manual which would identify alternatives to the current operating plan. Endangered species and political issues as well as legal challenges continue to prevent consensus on the Master Manual Update, therefore no significant changes have occurred in the management of the river system by 2001.

In February 1992, the Corps released an updated Master Plan, Design Memorandum MFP-105D, for Fort Peck Dam and Reservoir. This Plan represents overall policy and management concepts applicable to Fort Peck. The broad intent of the Plan is to document policies which do the following:

Corps of Engineers

1) Determine appropriate uses and levels of development of Fort Peck's resources;

2) Provide a framework within which the Operational Management Plan and Annual Management Plan can be developed and implemented;

3) Establish a basis on which outgrants and recreational development proposals can be evaluated.

Fish and Wildlife Service

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) manages the 1.3 million acre Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge which encompasses the entire Fort Peck project area. Refuge specific goals and objectives outline habitat and population levels for a variety of species. Upland and shoreline vegetation is managed through the administration of livestock grazing program. To the extent possible, the refuge will manage riparian and shoreline vegetation to benefit fish habitat that develops as the result of fluctuating reservoir levels. The Fish and Wildlife Service refuge management plan is set forth in a Final Environmental Impact Statement, which was finalized 1985. The FWS and the Corps of Engineers cooperatively developed the Fort Peck Lake Master Plan (Design Memorandum MFP-105D), which specifically identifies recreation facilities and development on the lake.

Local Agencies

The Corps of Engineers occasionally issues permits to other agencies and private individuals to manage recreation sites on the lake. Recreation facilities such as camping areas, marina and boat docks are operated by a concessionaire. Leases are issued for up to twenty years and can be revoked at any time by the Secretary of the Army.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

The Department coordinates the management of fish and wildlife resources with the Fish and Wildlife Service and manages the State Parks and State Recreation Areas located on lands leased from the Federal Government. State hunting and fishing regulations apply within the Fort Peck project boundaries. The Department manages the reservoir and upstream and downstream fisheries.

Specific recreation sites managed by the department include Duck Creek Fishing Access Site west of Fort Peck Dam, Rock Creek Fishing Access Site on the Big Dry Arm of the Reservoir, and Hell Creek Recreation Area north of Jordan.

Joint Agency Efforts

A three-year project was completed in 1990 to improve access to Fort Peck Reservoir through the joint efforts of five counties, the Federal agencies, and the Department. Various local, state and federal funds were used to accomplish this work. The projects included work on access roads and boat ramp facilities at the Pines, Hell Creek, Crooked Creek, and Nelson Creek Recreation areas. In 1990, efforts by the six surrounding counties, Fish and Wildlife Service, COE, BLM, and FWP resulted in additional improvements on access routes to Hell Creek, Crooked Creek, the Pines, Fourchette Bay, Slippery Ann, and Rock Creek (west end).

VI. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

The Department has attempted to involve the public in all aspects of the development of this Management Plan. These efforts are detailed below in chronological order.

Creel Survey

A reservoir-wide creel survey was conducted from April through September 1997. The creel survey was not only important from the standpoint of angling results, but also allowed the Department to interview anglers to determine which fish species they prefer to fish in the Fort Peck.

Scoping Meetings

The Department held a series of scoping meetings in area communities during December 2000 and January 2001, to obtain public input on issues and problems to be addressed in the revised Management Plan. Meetings were held in Wolf Point, Havre, Glasgow, Miles City, Glendive, and Billings. The meetings were advertised in area newspapers and on radio stations and anglers were advised that they could submit written comments to the Department in the event they could not attend the meetings. The input received at these meetings is summarized and is contained in the Appendix.

Advisory Committee

The Department utilized the assistance of an Advisory Committee to help at several key points in the development of the revised Management Plan. Initially to review the overall schedule for revision of the plan, review and comment on summary of public input from issue scoping meetings, review summary of public comments on the first and second draft plans and assist the Department in addressing the public's comments.

Fifteen individuals from area communities were selected to participate on the Advisory Committee. They represented a variety of interests ranging from anglers to chambers of commerce to federal managers of Fort Peck. A complete list of the membership of the Advisory Committee is contained in the Appendix.

Public Review of Draft Plans

The availability of the first Draft Plan for public review and comment was announced on May 7, 2001, by means of a press release to the media and written notice to various individuals who had participated in the development of the Plan. Written public comment was solicited on the first draft of the revised management plan for a period of one month from May 7 to June 8, 2001. Draft plans were mailed to all attendees of previous public issue scoping meetings, those who had provided written comments regarding issue scoping, individuals listed on regional fisheries cooperators list, individuals who requested draft plans via phone or in writing, and to the interested public at large by sending copies of the plan to all FWP regional headquarters throughout the state. Comment forms were attached to each draft plan to provide an accurate and efficient method of summarizing public input. A total of 75 original forms were received out of 410 distributed. Nine individuals chose to comment by letter and 15 by form letter (see summary in Appendix).

A second draft plan was written based on public comments on the first plan, and availability was announced through the media on September 21, 2001**.** Copies were again sent out to members of the public who had submitted comments on the first draft, individuals who requested draft plans via phone or in writing, and to the interested public at large by sending copies to all FWP regional headquarters, Helena headquarters and area offices**.** Of the 725 original comment forms distributed, a total of 155 original forms and 12 letters/e-mails were returned by the October 19th deadline. In addition, 93 surveys with photo copied responses were received, along with 433 Walleye Unlimited forms (see summary in Appendix).

Final Plan

The Final Management Plan will be reviewed and signed by the Director in March. The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission at their monthly meeting in April, will review appeals to the Final Plan. The availability of the Final Plan and a summary of its major provisions will be announced to the public in March 2002.

VII. FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

The fishery in Fort Peck is diverse with approximately 50 different fish species, most of which are native to the Missouri River. Sixteen species, mostly game fish, have been introduced to develop sport-fishing opportunities. Managing such an array of fish species can be difficult, especially when attempting to allocate limited resources and manpower. It must be understood that fish populations and management effort cannot be expanded indefinitely, both are finite resources. Increasing effort and funding for one species, results in reduced effort and funds for another. The Department will strive to maintain the unique diversity of the Fort Peck fishery, with management of game fish species prioritized by angler preference to aid the Department in allocating its resources in the proper proportions.

The Fort Peck fishery is a very complex and dynamic biological ecosystem and populations will definitely fluctuate over time. While certain environmental conditions may favor one population at any given time, it may not be ideal for another. As an example, attempting to maximize abundance of one predator population by stocking without considering the present status of another predator species, or the present or predicted abundance of forage fish populations, could result in severe declines in forage. This may lead to loss in growth and condition of several game fish species, from which recovery can be agonizingly slow. Fortunately, Fort Peck has not experienced a collapse in its forage base, however these situations can and do occur.

Oahe, another Missouri River mainstem reservoir in South Dakota, suffered a catastrophic decline in its rainbow smelt population. Loss of this forage base resulted in severe negative impacts to its predator fish populations, like walleye, chinook salmon and northern pike. Recovery of growth and condition of these populations may take up to a decade. While the loss of the Oahe forage base was due to reservoir water level management, the angling public needs to be aware that other factors, like overstocking predators can have similar consequences. FWP personnel will attempt to gather as much information on the fishery as possible through routine surveys and sampling to keep the public informed and to make sound management decisions to avoid similar situations.

The Department has analyzed fisheries management on a species by species basis, and therefore this Plan will address each species individually in the following sections. Fisheries issues such as population status and fishing tournaments are discussed. Each section will first address the fisheries data and the resource capability, next the angler's desires, then possible management options, and lastly the recommended management actions.

Walleye

Walleye were first introduced in 1951 and during the late 1960's and early 1970's an outstanding walleye fishery evolved in the Big Dry Arm of the reservoir. This was attributed to unusually good spawning conditions in Big Dry Creek. Unfortunately, these conditions occur only infrequently when flows are sufficient to allow spawners access to gravel in the creek. The reservoir has very little suitable walleye spawning habitat along its shoreline. Annual beach seining in the upper reservoir indicates that natural reproduction also occurs on a limited basis at undetermined locations in the Missouri River above Fort Peck.

The walleye fishery fared poorly in the late 1970's and early 1980's due to lack of natural reproduction and a decline in forage fish abundance. Stocking was resumed in 1977 to address the declining walleye population. Fry and fingerling plants totaled more than 390 million and 18.7 million, respectively, by 2000. The forage fish problem appears to have been resolved by introducing spottail shiners in 1982, and cisco in 1984. Both species reproduced well and expanded their populations throughout the reservoir. As a result, the average weight, condition factor, and growth rate of walleye have improved dramatically.

Presently, good walleye fishing is found throughout the reservoir. Growth rates are excellent and walleye in the three to five pound range are common. During the 1997 creel survey, the reservoir-wide catch rate for walleye was 0.27 fish per hour and the average size harvested by anglers was 2.2 pounds. The future for reservoir walleye fishing looks promising, and it is believed that further enhancement can be achieved through careful management. The reservoir does not, however, provide suitable spawning habitat to sustain the population and future maintenance and expansion will depend on stocking.

Fisheries management efforts at present are chiefly devoted to walleye, based on angler preference. Public scoping comments indicated that the majority of anglers want the Department to focus their management effort on walleye. Walleye were ranked first preference in both the 1990 and 1997 creel surveys. More recently, public input on a questionnaire accompanying the first draft of the revised Management Plan in 2001, indicated that 92% of respondents supported continued effort by FWP to place its major management effort on walleye. Public comments on the second draft of the revised Management Plan focused primarily on the desire for improved walleye catch rates to be attained by increased fingerling stocking.

Interest in walleye has more than doubled from 1990 to 1997. During public scoping in 1991, anglers expressed concern about the availability of sufficient walleye fingerlings. Some felt that more walleye hatching and rearing facilities should be constructed. During the 1990's, the Corps of Engineers added seven additional walleye rearing ponds to the four ponds constructed in the late 1980's. Partial funding for these ponds was also provided by Walleyes Unlimited. These ponds have been utilized by FWP to increase the number of fingerlings stocked in Fort Peck. A new hatchery for warmwater species was proposed to the state legislature and approved in 1999. Authorization for the hatchery was then sought from Congress and the project was approved in 2000. Congress appropriated $1.5 million dollars in 2001, which will facilitate engineering and design. Additional funding by Congress is necessary to complete construction by 2005. A hatchery will provide more flexibility for walleye management by providing additional walleye fingerlings. When construction of this new facility nears completion, FWP will provide an update on the status of the fishery and supply more detail on how it will be incorporated into future management of Fort Peck at the annual Glasgow public meeting.

An intensive walleye egg-taking and stocking effort has been essential over the years to maintain an acceptable angler catch rate in Fort Peck. To date, the maximum number of fingerlings that have been planted in any given year has been 2.2 million. The Miles City

Hatchery achieved full rearing pond production in 1999, and can provide a total of 1.5 million fingerlings annually for Fort Peck. An additional 0.5 million fingerlings can be produced from the satellite rearing ponds at Fort Peck. Walleye fry are also stocked annually, and in some years plants have exceeded 30 million.

Due to concerns of potentially overstocking predator fish, walleye fingerling plants significantly greater than 2 million should be conducted initially using adaptive management. In general, suitable walleye stocking rates will be determined based on present walleye condition, relative weights, abundance of forage fish, as well as status of other predator fish populations. Reservoir pool elevations must also be considered, as water levels effect overall production of plankton, forage (Appendix pages 60 & 61) and other predator fish populations (Appendix page 62).

When reservoir elevations decline, aquatic vegetation is diminished as well as fish cover. With the loss of cover and suitable spawning areas, shoreline forage fish abundance is reduced. The decrease in shoreline forage fish abundance is evident when relative weights of walleye less than 18 inches decrease. Greater walleye plants are appropriate in years when the reservoir pool is expected to rise, inundating shoreline vegetation. This provides more plankton for young fish, additional spawning and rearing cover for forage fish, as well as more protective cover for young walleye. During years when declining reservoir elevations occur over extended periods (drought) and are anticipated to persist, exceeding the base stock of 2 million fingerlings may be detrimental to maintaining an optimal walleye fishery.

The following management recommendation reflects the public's strong desire to increase walleye catch rates on Fort Peck. The highest documented angler catch rate for walleye on the lake occurred in 1997, with 0.27 fish per hour. The public has proposed a goal of 0.5 fish per hour. Walleye fisheries in surrounding states and provinces and throughout the Midwest, which have minimal or no natural reproduction, like Fort Peck, consistently have catch rates that are significantly less (Appendix pages 55 & 56). This is an ambitious goal, but the department will endeavor to accomplish this while carefully monitoring effects on other key elements of the fishery. FWP will also monitor overall angler satisfaction and abundance of larger fish ($\geq$ 20") as additional measures of fishing quality.

Expanding the walleye fingerling stocking program on Fort Peck in the near future hinges on finding new sources of walleye fingerling. The current rearing capacity within Montana is around 2.0 million. Preliminary inquires outside the state and potential changes in rearing strategies at Miles City Hatchery may provide an additional 1.0 million fingerlings, which could expand FWP's ability to stock up to 3.0 million fingerlings annually until a new hatchery comes on line. Out-of-state sources are not absolute, as their primary obligation is to meet their own in-state production needs. Once fully operational, the new Fort Peck Hatchery is projected to have an annual walleye fingerling rearing capacity of 2.5 million, resulting in total in-state production of 4.5 million. This should supply walleye fingerlings to meet stocking requests statewide including the needs of Fort Peck Reservoir.

Management program for the walleye fishery:

1) Continue to place the major management effort on walleye.

2) Catch rate and angler satisfaction will be measured with a lake-wide creel at minimum 3-year interval*. FWP will also work with tournament directors to obtain consistent and standardized catch rate information from tournament participants to augment lake-wide creel surveys.*

Angler satisfaction goals:

- angler catch rate attains, or approaches, 0.5 walleye per hour

- 60% of anglers rate their overall fishing experience as good or excellent on the following scale: (very poor poor fair good excellent)

- 20% of walleye sampled by annual gill netting exceeds 20" length

3) Stock a minimum of 2.0 million and up to a maximum of 3.0 million fingerling annually (pre-new hatchery) and up to total of 3.5 to 4.5 million fingerling annually (post-new hatchery). Augment fingerling stocking with fry as conditions and availability allow. The number of walleye stocked will be contingent on number of eggs available and environmental conditions such as water level, predator/prey density, health of game fish populations as determined by the following:

Stocking Evaluation Criteria: The following criteria will be considered by FWP, and reviewed with the Advisory Committee, and presented at the annual public meeting prior to implementing the final stocking plan.

a. Physical Condition of Existing Walleye Population
   - relative weights should be minimum of 90 for walleye greater than 18", and minimum of 80 for walleye 18" or less (in 2000, relative weights were 91 and 76, respectively). Other population structure indices will be considered (Appendix page 58).

b. Reservoir Water Levels
   - reservoir should have forecast of rising or stable pool in spring of present year (this is precursor to increased shoreline forage fish production).

c. Shoreline Forage Fish
   - average beach seine combined catch rate for emerald shiner, spottail shiner, y-o-y crappie, y-o-y yellow perch should be greater than 100/seine haul. (this would indicate adequate abundance of forage fish for walleye less than 18 inches)

d. Cisco Abundance
   - average vertical gill-net catch rate for y-o-y cisco should be greater than 20/gill-net. (this would indicate adequate production of forage fish for

walleye greater than 18 inches)

4) Continue the daily limit of 5 fish and 10 fish possession limit.

Sauger

Although data is limited, in recent years sauger abundance in some areas of its native Montana range show declines. Portions of the mid-Missouri River and adjoining Fort Peck Reservoir appear to have suffered reductions in populations (Appendix page 63). Sauger were added to Montana's list of Species of Special Concern in 2000, as a result of a state-wide status review completed by Tom McMahon in 1999. The specific cause of the sauger decline is currently unknown, however some researchers attribute it to the drought in the late 1980's and early 1990's. Adult sauger are most abundant in the upper Missouri arm of Fort Peck Reservoir and young-of-year have been captured almost exclusively in this area. Undoubtedly, adult and young sauger drift downstream from the Missouri River above the reservoir, where more suitable riverine-type habitat is available for spawning.

Public comments indicate that anglers are aware and concerned about declining sauger numbers in the reservoir and in the Missouri River above Fort Peck. Some anglers have suggested stocking sauger in the lake to augment the existing population; however stocking efforts to increase overall population abundance would be more successful in the Missouri River where natural reproduction is more probable. If stocking sauger fingerling and fry is determined to be necessary to augment wild populations, enhancement efforts are more likely to be sustained by populations upstream in native habitat. Ultimately, surplus fish are likely to migrate downstream and replenish the reservoir population as well.

Management program for the sauger fishery:

1) The sauger population in Fort Peck Reservoir is dependent primarily on natural reproduction in the Missouri River upstream, and no stocking is planned or recommended within the Reservoir.

2) Reduce the daily limit to 1 fish and 2 fish in possession until the sauger population in the Missouri River upstream increases in abundance, in which case, the catch limit will be re-evaluated and adjusted accordingly.

Smallmouth Bass

Smallmouth bass were first introduced into Fort Peck in 1981, and by 1983 stocking was discontinued. Stocking was resumed in 1993, and continued on an annual basis through 2000. More than 280,000 fingerling have been planted during this period. Smallmouth have survived well and established rapidly. Natural reproduction has increased steadily over the years (Appendix page 63). Minor supplemental stocking on the face of the dam and in the vicinity of the breakwater appears to have increased bank fishing opportunities and may continue depending on future evaluations. During drought years, when reservoir elevations preclude good spawning success, supplemental stocking in these

areas may also be warranted. Successful natural reproduction has made smallmouth bass young-of-year the most common sport fish observed during annual fall seining.

Interest of anglers as well as fishing skills appear to be growing with time, as smallmouth are caught more frequently throughout the reservoir. The average weight of smallmouth taken by anglers during the 1997 creel survey was 1.6 pounds. The catch rate was 0.02 fish per hour, nearly double that of the catch rate in 1991. Thus far, the largest smallmouth bass officially recorded from Fort Peck was 6.4 pounds, which was the state record in 2000.

Smallmouth bass ranked fifth in angler preference during the 1997 creel. Anglers caught over 3,000 during the creel in 1997, an increase of over 1,000 from the 1991 reservoir-wide creel. The current creel limit of five fish per day appears to be satisfactory to anglers and corresponds with present smallmouth bass management.

Management program for the smallmouth bass fishery:

1) Continue to maintain a viable smallmouth bass fishery that is primarily sustained by natural reproduction and augmented on a limited basis at specific areas by supplemental stocking.

2) Continue present daily and possession limits of 5 fish.

Lake Trout

Lake trout introductions were made from 1953 to 1957 and only isolated reports of angler catches were made through the 1960's. During the 1970's populations appeared to increase through natural reproduction and catches became more common. The population appeared to stabilize during the 1980's and excellent catches contributed to expanded angler interest.

Most fishing activity for lake trout occurs during spring and fall in the vicinity of the dam. Lake trout ranked fourth in angler preference during the 1997 creel. Catch rates averaged 0.15 fish per hour in the spring of 1990, and 0.10 fish per hour in the fall. The mean length was 27.1 inches and mean weight was 8.9 pounds. In 1999, the spring catch rate was 0.28 per hour with an average size of 27.0 inches and 7.8 pounds. More fishing opportunities for lake trout are being realized by anglers during summer as more sophisticated equipment, such as downriggers, are utilized. Creel surveys have become increasingly difficult to conduct by reservoir fisheries staff due to competing management responsibilities. Increased efforts of walleye spawning and rearing of fingerling have precluded spring surveys. Fall lake trout surveys have been precluded by redirection of staff to salmon spawning. The possibility of conducting creels with volunteers and asking lake trout anglers to voluntarily report catches, may provide an alternative means to monitor the lake trout population in the future.

Periodic creel surveys presently provide the only source of information on lake trout. Creel surveys from 1986 through 2000 indicate a range of angler catch rates from 0.05 to 0.30 fish/hour. Natural reproduction is presumed adequate to sustain the population

during "normal" runoff years. However, during drought years when reservoir levels decline significantly, supplemental stocking has been implemented. Over 340,000 lake trout eggs were taken in the fall of 1990 and 93,000 fingerlings hatched from these eggs were stocked in the spring of 1991. Stocking of lake trout from sources other than Fort Peck is not recommended for two reasons: 1) securing eggs from other sources comes with risk of disease introduction 2) some strains of lake trout may not spawn as successfully as those originally stocked in the 1950's from Seneca Lake, NY.

Specific sites utilized by lake trout for spawning and impacts of various water levels are not completely known at present. Significant concentrations of spawners during fall indicate that a large percentage of the population utilizes the rock rip-rap along the face of the dam. As the reservoir elevation drops below 2230 ft, a large percentage of suitable lake trout spawning habitat is de-watered. It is recommended that wild lake trout be captured and spawned artificially when the reservoir elevation falls below 2225 ft. to augment limited natural reproduction.

Sustained or frequent drawdowns of Fort Peck Reservoir could have grave impacts on lake trout reproduction. In addition to the loss of spawning habitat, incubating eggs are de-watered as the pool drops, cold water habitat necessary for lake trout survival is also drastically diminished.

Management program for the lake trout fishery:

1) Manage the high quality lake trout fishery with a goal of maintaining the average size of fish at, or above, 7 pounds, and an angler catch rate of 0.15 and 0.10 for spring and fall, respectively.

2) Conduct spring and fall creel surveys when possible to monitor catch rate, condition factors, and average size of lake trout. In years when FWP staff cannot creel, a volunteer angler creel will be attempted as a method to obtain catch and harvest numbers, and length and weight data.*

3) Conduct supplemental stocking of lake trout if future surveys indicate need, or lake elevations dewater the majority of suitable spawning habitat. Stocked fish will be marked to determine their contribution to the fishery and may also provide a population abundance index.*

4) Continue present daily and possession limit of 3 fish, barring any significant decline in present angler catch rates, or extended period of reservoir drawdown exceeding 3 years.

Northern Pike

Northern Pike were not found in Fort Peck Reservoir until an initial stocking occurred in 1951. A good fishery developed following rising water levels in the late 1950's and early 1960s that flooded shoreline vegetation. From the mid-1960's to early 1990's recruitment was variable. Good reproduction was documented as the reservoir filled from 1992 through 1997. Recruitment dropped quickly, however, as reservoir levels

declined in 1998 to 2000. During this period, low pool elevations de-watered shoreline vegetation necessary for successful spawning of adult pike and limited shoreline cover for juveniles. Over the years, fluctuating water levels have provided intermittent northern pike spawning conditions, resulting in boom or bust production cycles (Appendix page 62).

Stocking efforts were increased in the early 1970's to improve the fishery and over 1.6 million fry were planted from 1972 to 1982. Most stocking occurred in the lower portion of the reservoir from the spillway area to Duck Creek. Stocking in the Big Dry Arm was curtailed when the walleye fishery developed. Plants were resumed on a very limited basis in 1990-1993 due to reduced natural reproduction that occurred during drought years, when spawning conditions for northern pike were marginal.

The introduction of spottail shiners and cisco has dramatically increased the forage base for northern pike, as with other predator fish species, resulting in increased growth rates and condition.

Results of the 1997 creel survey show the catch rate increased since 1990 and was 0.04 fish per hour. These fish averaged 28.7 inches and 6.2 pounds. The creel also indicated that northern pike are using cisco as their main forage base. Supporting a larger population of northern pike may be possible if the forage base remains static or increases. Northern pike were the third most desired fish as a first preference and most preferred fish for second choice during the 1997 angler creel.

Management program for the northern pike fishery:

1) Continue to monitor population abundance and production through annual surveys.

2) Maintain, or slightly increase, populations through natural reproduction and limited stocking. When reservoir levels are not suitable for successful spawning, 200,000 fingerlings will be stocked annually or 1 million fry, depending on hatchery availability. Northern pike stocking will be reduced if forage fish abundance declines or abundance of other predator species dramatically increase.

3) Continue present daily and possession limit of 10 fish.

Chinook Salmon

Chinook salmon introduced in 1983 added diversity and provided a trophy-type fishery to the existing sport fishery. Chinook do not reproduce naturally in the reservoir and require annual stocking to maintain the population. Initially, plants of chinook were small to prevent undue pressure on the developing cisco population and averaged 15,000 fingerlings per year from 1983 to 1985. Stocking was increased to 50,000 fingerlings in 1986, 200,000 in 1987, and 56,000 in 1988. No chinook were stocked in spring of 1989 and 1990, due to problems in obtaining disease-free eggs. Efforts to obtain eggs were successful in the fall of 1990, with over 100,000 procured from North Dakota, and 63,000 fingerlings were stocked in the spring of 1991. Stocking continued to be variable

in the 1990's. The only disease-free chinook salmon in the lower 48 states were found in the Missouri mainstem reservoirs in the Dakota's and Montana.

Chinook salmon, like other large predator species, appear to be utilizing cisco as forage. The average weight of chinook creeled in the fall of 1990 was 14 pounds and the largest caught to date was 31 pounds 2 ounces, the present state record. Chinook salmon were ranked second in angler preference. Average weight of salmon creeled in 1997 was 17 pounds, indicating a stable forage base for the numbers stocked.

Thus far, management of chinook salmon has achieved the goal of providing a more diverse and trophy-type fishery. Maintenance and further development of this fishery is anticipated in the coming years, but problems acquiring disease-free eggs have hampered efforts to consistently stock 200,000 fingerlings annually. Abundance of the forage base will also influence future stocking rates.

Because disease-free eggs can only be acquired from North and South Dakota, a working group was started to attempt to manage the three-state chinook salmon population as one. The Tri-state Missouri River Salmon Group consists of biologists, culturalists, and fish health specialists. This group coordinates egg requests between member states, equipment needs, and research needs. This group considers the creation of a multi-state brood stock vital to survival of this fishery. It is recommended that when the Fort Peck Fish Hatchery is designed it should include a facility to house chinook brood stock to fill egg needs of two member states in any given year. This will provide supplemental eggs to augment those taken from wild fish populations.

Management program for the chinook salmon fishery:

1) Maintain the population at, or near, the 1989/1990 levels, and thereby continue to provide the opportunity to catch "trophy sized" fish. (Targeting a specific catch rate and average weight is presently unfeasible due to inadequate creel data.)

2) Pursue a reliable egg source to help achieve annual stocking of approximately 200,000 fingerlings between 3 and 4 inches or equivalent variations. Numbers of chinook salmon stocked would be dependent on cisco abundance monitored in previous surveys.

3) When available, take eggs from wild Fort Peck stock and continue rearing fingerlings in reservoir net-pens on annual basis.*

4) Continue working with the Tri-State Salmon Group to maintain and improve the Missouri River chinook salmon population to provide each state's needs with disease-free eggs and sustain disease-free status for resident population.

5) Continue present daily and possession limit of 5 fish.

Forage Fish

Steady increases in sediment and decreasing availability of nutrients in the reservoir along with fluctuating water levels, caused a severe decline in forage fish abundance during the late 1970's, early 1980's. To augment the forage base, spottail shiners and cisco were introduced which were more suited to existing reservoir conditions. With a more diverse forage base the severe declines have been somewhat buffered, but reductions have been observed in the late 1980's - early 1990's, and again in the late 1990's (Appendix page 60).

Spottail shiners were first stocked in 1982 and rapidly established themselves throughout the shoreline areas of the reservoir. By 1987 they became the most abundant forage fish occupying shoreline habitat and have remained so through 2000. During rising lake elevations, spottail shiners recruit very well. Utilization of this species by game fish has been documented. As abundance of spottail and other shoreline forage fish decline during falling lake elevations, (i.e. dewatering of spawning vegetation and cover), it has been observed that relative weights of small game fish also drop.

Cisco, which prefer the deep open areas of the reservoir, were introduced in 1984 and have also populated the reservoir quickly. Yearlings and young-of year have been recovered from the stomachs of all game fish species. Large robust cisco adults were commonly observed by the fall of 1986, but since the summer and fall of 1988 average sizes diminished and stabilized. The reduction in size is attributed to increased abundance of cisco, resulting in keen competition for food. This situation is viewed as being very beneficial to resident game fish, as a large number of readily eatable forage became available. Vertical gill net sampling in 1986 through 2000 indicates cisco production has been somewhat variable (Appendix page 61). This variability is likely due to the duration of ice cover on the reservoir and changes in lake elevation at critical time periods. Late freeze-up results in wave action during the period when cisco eggs are incubating allowing sediment to smother eggs. Significant withdrawal of water during winter may result in de-watering of incubating eggs that are dropped by cisco in shallow water.

Hydroacoustic assessment of cisco stocks should be evaluated as a monitoring tool for population abundance. Cisco comprise nearly 100% of the diets of lake trout and salmon, and greater than 50% of the diets of walleye and northern pike greater than 18 inches. Stocking rates of walleye, northern pike, salmon and lake trout should be determined on the abundance of the cisco population.

<u>Management program for the forage fish:</u>

1) Maintain forage fish abundance and diversity by making annual water level recommendations that are favorable for natural reproduction (i.e. flooded vegetation and cover).

2) Monitor forage fish populations to acquire information for future management decisions, such as determining number of game fish species to be stocked.

3) Evaluate hydroacoustic assessments as a tool to monitor cisco population. If it proves to be useful as a management tool, pursue acquisition of necessary equipment.*

Fish Population Surveys and Creels

It is apparent in the above sections dealing with individual fish species that a key management tool is having good estimates and understanding of population abundance and conditions of the various species. This information is gathered throughout the year by several different means. Sampling fish populations with trap nets, gill nets and beach seines is one method to determine species composition, distribution, relative abundance, condition, average size, etc. Creel surveys are another extremely important tool, whether they are done on a limited site for a short period, or for a whole season on the entire reservoir, such as was done in 1990 and 1997. They provide information on the size and condition of the fish being caught by anglers, relative numbers of the various species, catch rates, and the degree of angler satisfaction.

When Advisory Committee members were asked in the 1991, the group felt that all of the sampling techniques should be used on an annual basis, with a major season-long creel survey occurring every two or three years, but at a minimum, every five years. Unfortunately, due to inadequate funding, a second creel survey didn't occur until 1997, exceeding the recommended maximum time period by two years. The Advisory Committee convened for the revision of the Fort Peck Management Plan in 2000, and again supported current routine sampling techniques. They also suggested that more frequent creel surveys would result in better management of this complex fishery.

Management program for fish population Trends:

1) Continue the present annual program of trap netting, gill netting, beach seining, and spot creel surveys.

2) Secure the funding to conduct season-long, lake-wide, creel surveys a minimum of every three years.*

Fishing Tournaments

Statewide regulations for fishing contests, adopted pursuant to the 1987 Montana Legislature, do not outline specific guidelines for tournaments on specific waters. Each tournament application is reviewed by fisheries field personnel to determine if any adverse impacts to the fisheries resource are anticipated, or if there would be conflicts with other recreational uses. Information on the proposed tournament is also posted in major newspapers throughout eastern Montana for a 30-day public review and comment period. If no controversial issues arise and FWP determines that the proposed tournament will have no significant biological, or social impacts, it is approved.

The observation that tournaments are gaining in popularity is well supported by the number held in 2000; 8 walleye tournaments, one northern pike and one bass. Tournaments held in 2001 included; 8 walleye, 2 northern pike and one bass.

One of the walleye tournaments held in 2000 was extremely controversial. The public and the Department were very concerned when mortality reached nearly 87%. This high

mortality was mainly attributed to the format of the tournament, which was a weigh-in type. Tournament sponsors required participants to bring their daily catch to a central location to be weighed on stage. Air and water temperatures were very high and many fish had been held in live-wells for long periods and transported long distances. All of these factors resulted in very few fish being considered suitable for release.

The Department does not wish to see fishing contests adversely affect game fish populations or recreational opportunities and therefore encourages non-consumptive use of the resource. The Department's state-wide tournament rules do not limit the number of derbies, format type, time, or number of participants for specific waters. The Department is planning to revise statewide rules pertaining to fishing contests, or develop a more detailed framework for tournaments in 2002. This process should provide a more detailed basis for regulating tournaments and will complement tournament rules already outlined in this plan for Fort Peck Reservoir.

Public scoping comments in 2000, suggest that tournament organizers conduct catch and release events, as opposed to harvest events. They also suggested that contests should be held during cooler months to reduce fish mortality. Some anglers recommended that individual catch limits for walleye tournaments be reduced from the legal five fish limit. (It should be noted that a reduced limit is currently self-imposed by tournament organizers.)

During the Advisory Committee meetings held in 2001, it was discussed and agreed that creel survey information be gathered from annual tournaments and used to augment information on periodic lake-wide creels conducted by FWP. During the public comment period on the second draft of the revised management plan in October 2001, Walleyes Unlimited made a similar suggestion. FWP will work with tournament directors to obtain consistent and standardized catch rate information.*

Anglers attending scoping meetings in 2000 wanted tournament organizers to hold true "catch and release events (limit or ban weigh-in type tournaments). The Department was also asked to limit the number of tournaments and participants. The Department recognizes that there is a segment of the public that is not interested in competitive fishing events for reasons ranging from objection to commercialization of a natural resource, to infringement of their water-based recreational experience**.** FWP is also cognizant of anglers who are strong advocates of tournaments and the economic importance to local communities surrounding the Lake. FWP will strive to provide a balance with existing uses of the reservoir, providing opportunities for anglers who enjoy participating in tournaments while regulating numbers to accommodate those who do not.

<u>Management program for fishing tournaments:</u>

1) A maximum of 12 open water tournaments per year, mandatory catch and release, will be permitted. Preference will be given to applicants of established or traditional tournaments previously held on Fort Peck.

2) Tournaments will be reviewed on an individual basis, as they have in the past, with social and biological impacts considered as well as a 30-day public review and comment period.

3) All catch and release tournaments with weigh-in type format will be limited to cool weather periods: May - June 15th, or after September 15th.

4) No tournaments will be allowed on holiday weekends such as Memorial Day, 4th of July, or Labor Day.

5) The area or boundaries of tournaments will be kept to a size that will attempt to reduce mortality caused by captured fish being hauled in live-wells over an inordinate distance and/or over an extended period of time.

6) Only one tournament per day will be permitted to be headquartered out of any marina or boat access area.

7) Work with tournament directors to obtain consistent and standardized catch rate information.*

VIII. OTHER RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

There are several areas where the Department does not have specific authority, but as the recreation management agency for the State, the Department must represent the interests of the public with agencies who do have such authorities. With regard to Fort Peck Reservoir, these authorities deal with access to the reservoir and water level management of the reservoir. Each of these topics is addressed in the following sections.

Fishing and Recreational Access

Fort Peck Reservoir is the largest body of water in Montana with 240,000 surface acres and 1,500 miles of shoreline at full pool. Currently there are a total of 17 public access sites located on the shoreline, which are administered by Army Corp of Engineers (COE). These recreation sites are managed privately or by government natural resource agencies. The following inventory lists the site name along with the entity responsible for the day-to-day recreation management of the site:

West End Campground ……....COE
Fort Peck Marina ……COE and private concessionaire
Duck Creek Campground ……COE
Duck Creek Fishing Access Site ……..FWP
The Pines ……COE
Bonetrail ……..COE
Fourchette Bay …… COE
James Kipp ……..BLM
Crooked Creek ……COE and private concessionaire
Devils Creek ……....COE

Hell Creek Marina …….. COE, FWP, and private concessionaire
Hell Creek State Park …….. FWP
Nelson Creek ……...COE
McGuire Creek ……COE
Rock Creek Marina ……. COE and private concessionaire
Rock Creek Fishing Access Site ……. FWP and COE
Bear Creek ……...COE

Results of a Public Scoping questionnaire conducted in the early 90's showed that about 35% of the respondents listed lack of access as a significant management issue. In addition, specific detailed needs were listed in the areas of access roads, parking, boat ramps, marina services, handicapped access, picnic facilities, RV parking, toilets, drinking water, and fish cleaning facilities.

Since the early 90's and the public scoping process, access sites have been added, roadway improvements were completed and many on-site improvements have been made. The following is a summary of these enhancements of recreation sites on Fort Peck Lake:

The BLM made many positive improvements at the James Kipp access site, located on the Missouri River upstream of Fort Peck Reservoir. These accomplishments include an improved and better defined camping and picnic area, latrine replacements, dump station, development of water wells and hydrants, improvement of boat launching area and parking facilities, development of recreation site roadway and construction of campground host/caretaker facilities.

Since the late 80's and early 90's, when a joint effort by five counties, COE, USFWS, BLM and funding of 1.5 million dollars from FWP, resulted in improvements to roads at the Pines, Crooked Creek, Hell Creek, Rock Creek and Duck Creek, additional road projects have continued. The Corps of Engineers in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and six counties surrounding the lake have contributed much money, time and effort at most sites they manage. Improvements to access roads to The Pines, Rock Creek, Hell Creek, Crooked Creek, Duck Creek, Nelson Creek, Flat Lake, Floodplain, and Fourchette Bay have occurred in the past 6 years. In addition, the Fish and Wildlife Service has completed road improvements to the Slippery Ann Elk Viewing Area, Rock Creek West Boat Ramp, and along their auto tour-route (all sites located along the Missouri River upstream from Fort Peck Lake).

Many recreation facility improvements have been made throughout the project. These include: defined and hardened campsites, new vault toilets, and a well for drinking water at Nelson Creek; poured concrete boat ramp, defined and hardened campsites, new vault toilets, and shade trees at Fourchette Bay; defined and hardened campsites and shade trees at Bone Trail; defined and hardened campsites and a fish cleaning station at The Pines; and a 10-site-group camping area at the Downstream Recreation Area. The breakwater, constructed at the Fort Peck Marina in 1998, has been an additional cooperative success with the COE and FWP, as it provides the only protected harbor on Fort Peck Lake as well as fish spawning habitat.

Proposed improvements by the COE include campgrounds for the Crooked Creek and Rock Creek Recreation areas, construction of a Class A campground overlooking the lake off the West End of Fort Peck Dam, and construction of the Fort Peck Dam Interpretive Center. The interpretive center will provide an opportunity to showcase the construction history of the Fort Peck Project, the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, the rich paleontology of the region, and the abundant fish and wildlife resources of the area.

In 1997 FWP partnered with COE to install a new access road, parking area, boat ramp and latrine at Rock Creek Fishing Access Site. Future plans for Rock Creek from FWP and the COE include a fish cleaning station and boat ramp extension. Several local chapters of Walleyes Unlimited will also contribute funds for the future Rock Creek fish cleaning station.

In 2001, with the COE's assistance, FWP expanded the parking area and boat ramp and added two new latrines at the Duck Creek Fishing Access Site. During the summer of 2001, vehicle traffic was rerouted into this access site via Duck Creek County Road, a more direct route than the previous route. Future plans include an additional boat dock and additional boat ramp extension if and when low water levels allow.

During the 2000 and 2001 construction seasons several improvements and additions have taken place at FWP's Hell Creek State Park. These include the widening of the high water boat ramp, expansion and upgrade of parking areas, improved camping pads, installation of a RV dump station and upgrading of the fish cleaning station. All improvements were made solely by FWP except for the fish cleaning station, where a partnership was formed with a local Walleyes Unlimited chapter who assisted with cost and installation. Shower facilities will be completed in the summer of 2002 in the State Park.

Management actions for fishing and recreational access:

1) Utilize the specific results from the questionnaire to guide future development of fishing and recreational sites with federal aid funding.

2) Continue to encourage and cooperate with federal and county agencies in the development of recreational access.

Reservoir Water Levels

Fort Peck Reservoir is operated by the Corps of Engineers to provide flood control, navigation, irrigation, and power production. Other authorized purposes include recreation, fish and wildlife, and downstream municipal and industrial water supply. Accommodating the variety of uses with continually varying inflows creates a vary challenging situation for the Corps. This is especially apparent when the needs of the resident fish population must also be considered. Many fish species require specific water level patterns for successful spawning and rearing.

Recommendations from the Department to enhance and maintain the Fort Peck fishery are submitted annually to the Corps. Montana requests are coordinated with other

Missouri River states through the Missouri River Natural Resource Committee. Water level requests are based on existing reservoir levels and runoff forecasts. Requests may vary annually depending on the feasibility of achieving optimal conditions. In recent years the Corps has made a good effort to provide minimum discharges to benefit the fishery below the dam. However, their success in achieving recommended lake levels has been disappointing. While direct control of inflows is not feasible, control of outflows could greatly assist fisheries management, especially during critical spawning and rearing periods.

The Department has prepared recommendations as general guidelines for long-term water level management of Fort Peck Reservoir to help maintain and enhance the fishery. Large reservoirs that fluctuate like Fort Peck have littoral zones that are usually unstable. This results in loss of vascular aquatic and terrestrial plants and the associated populations of phytoplankton and benthic organisms. Lack of submerged vegetation causes a decline in the overall productivity of the entire fish population by reducing food supply, spawning habitat, and rearing cover. Submerged vegetation also provides protective cover for forage fish and young game fish species.

With a suitable water level management plan, shoreline vegetation growth can be enhanced and overall productivity of the littoral zone improved. The following plan is submitted for this purpose:

1) The absolute minimum pool should be established at 2225 feet above mean sea level. This would prevent the excessive loss of crucial shallow water habitat. It would also prevent the dewatering of over 60% of the rock riprap on the face of the dam, which is critical lake trout spawning habitat. At this level, walleye spawning in the Big Dry Arm will migrate further upstream, facilitating egg taking operations.

2) Several successive years of static water level operation is to be avoided. Drawdown cycles should be implemented every three to four years to allow shoreline vegetation to establish and be inundated incrementally over the remainder of the cycle. If natural drawdowns during severe drought do not occur, the storage in the upper three Missouri main stem reservoirs should be operated in an unbalanced manner. This will allow periodic drawdowns and refilling to occur, encouraging shoreline regrowth and subsequent inundation.

3) Regrowth of shoreline vegetation after a drawdown should be utilized to its ultimate potential. This can be accomplished by flooding established terrestrial vegetation with a maximum of three to five feet of water annually over a period of several years in succession. The optimum period for this rise to occur is April to early June to provide spawning, rearing habitat, and cover.

4) To accommodate spring spawning fish, water levels should rise as early as possible. Mid-April is the most preferable time with a steadily rising pool through May. It is understood that in some years mountain runoff does not occur at this time, but discharges can be reduced to facilitate flooding of shoreline vegetation at the earliest date possible. A rise of two to three feet is recommended during mid-April to mid-May. If inflow

conditions during drought conditions prevent this desired increase, water levels should remain stable. A drop in reservoir level during this time period should be avoided.

Public Scoping comments in 1990 regarding water level management were very limited. This was probably a result of the recognition of the Corps of Engineers inability to give recreation and fish and wildlife higher priority under its current operating plan.

Results of the Questionnaire 1991, showed that reservoir water levels were the most significant management issue mentioned by respondents. The drought in 2000 – 2001, continues to make this topic a major concern for reservoir recreationists and the general public.

Management actions for reservoir water levels:

1) Continue to monitor the effects of water levels on the fishery.

2) Continue to coordinate annual water level recommendations with other Missouri River basin states through the Missouri River Natural Resource Committee.

3) Continue to make annual water level recommendations to the Corps of Engineers that will benefit the fishery.

APPENDIX

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Bill Berg	Manager, CMR Nat'l Wildlife Refuge	Box 110, Airport Rd Lewistown MT 59457	USFWS
Tom Burch		PO Box 192 Fort Peck MT 59223	Unaffiliated Angler
Bob Dennee		3701 Stony Brook Bozeman MT 59715	Unaffiliated Angler
Steve Harada		211 E Indian Wolf Point MT 59201	Walleyes Unlimited
Andy Hicks		82 Bonnie Glasgow MT 59230	Walleyes Unlimited
Doug Hill		304 4 SE Sidney MT 59270	Unaffiliated Angler
Dennis Humphries		170 Sawney Dr Glasgow MT 59230	Walleyes Unlimited
Doug Komrosky		618 16th Havre MT 59501	PWT Angler Circuit Organizer
Jerry Ketchum		306 A Ash St. Marie MT 59231	Glasgow Chamber
Charlie Long		PO Box 89 Fort Peck MT 59223 1604 Parkhill, Billings MT 59102	Fishing Guide
Darin McMurray	US Army Corps Of Engineers	PO Box 208 Fort Peck MT 59223	COE
Fred Perry		PO Box 1211 Malta MT 59538	Walleyes Unlimited
Bill Schriver		PO Box 29 Hysham MT 59038	Rock Creek Marina Operator
Dave Waterson		Fort Peck MT 59223	Fort Peck Marina Operator

REVISION SCHEDULE FOR
FORT PECK FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN

2000	**Oct.**	**-**	**Form Advisory Committee**
	Nov.	**-**	**Meet with Advisory Committee, Discus need for Plan and Prominent issues, Revision Schedule**
	Nov.- Dec.	**-**	**Conduct Public Scoping Meetings**
2001	**Jan.**	**-**	**Summarize and Review Public Meeting Comments**
		-	**Meet with Advisory Committee, Discuss Public Comments and How to Address in Revised Plan**
	Feb.	**-**	**Write 1st Draft Plan**
	Mar.	**-**	**Review Draft Plan with Advisory Committee (amend as necessary)**
	Apr.	**-**	**Send 1st Draft Plan to Public Cooperators for Review and Comment**
	May	**-**	**Public Comments on Draft Plan are Reviewed and Summarized**
	Jul.	**-**	**Meet with Advisory Committee, Review Public Comments and Discuss Appropriate Changes**
	Aug.	**-**	**Prepare 2nd Draft of Management Plan and Release to Advisory Committee for Review and Comment**
	Sep.	**-**	**Make Necessary Changes to Plan and Release to Public for Review and Comment**
	Nov.	**-**	**Review and Summarize Public Comments, Amend as Necessary, Submit Final Draft to Director for Approval**
		-	**FWP Commission Reviews Appeals to Final Plan**
2002	**Feb.**	**-**	**Final Plan Released to Public**

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING COMMENTS AND WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS ON ISSUE SCOPING FOR FORT PECK FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN

Wolf Point - 11/28/00

Number Attending: 7

Comments:
- Maximum of 2 walleye for daily limit during tournament pre-fishing
- Limit pre-fishing of participants to 3 days prior of tournament
- Impose a walleye slot limit for all tournaments
- Impose a walleye slot limit on "kill" tournaments
- Impose a slot limit on sauger
- Need more frequent creel surveys on Fort Peck to provide biologists with more info
- Require tournament sponsors to provide more information on catches of contestants
- Provide organizations like walleyes unlimited with fish logs to help gather fisheries information

Havre - 11/29/00

Number Attending: 6

Comments:
- Require all tournament sponsors to follow the same format
- Reduce number of tournaments held annually

Glasgow - 11/30/00

Number Attending: 19

Comments:
- Impose walleye slot limit on all tournaments
- Limit number of tournaments with a Lottery
- "Grandfather in" current tournaments held in 2000
- Impose ceiling on number of tournaments
- Impose limit on number of pre-fishing days
- Impose limit on number of fish kept during pre-fishing
- PWT tournament not be held in June, July, August
- PWT should be required to use format of current walleye circuit tournaments
- Boat ramps
    - Widen Duck Creek boat ramp
    - Separate wider ramps with markings
- Impose stricter limits on sauger

Miles City - 12/5/00

Number Attending: 2

Comments:
- Avoid tournaments during hot summer months
    - Restrict weigh-in-type tournaments to May thru mid-June **only**
    - Restrict paper-type tournaments to 1 fish in live well during July tournaments

Glendive - 12/6/00

Number Attending: 5

Comments:
- Limit tournaments to paper-type **only**
- Reduce number of dead fish, like Montana Walleye Circuit
- Do not allow PWT or other pro tournaments
- Reduce size of area for all tournaments, to facilitate easier access to check boats
- Restrict number of participants allowed in particular tournaments
- Restrict number of tournaments that may be held to 2/month May-September, all types\
- Impose rule to not allow any tournaments on Holidays
- No Fizzing of walleye during tournaments

Billings - 12/14/00

Number Attending: 39

Comments:
- Catch and hold (weigh-in) develop a slot limit to protect large fish
- Avoid hot weather for weigh-in type tournaments
- Have fish weighed near the shoreline
- Check boats should be marked better
- Ban weigh-in tournaments, check boats type **only**
- Weigh-in type format restricted to May thru mid-June
- Dead fish shouldn't be counted in any tournaments
- Limit tournaments to 2 per month with two week separation, period from ice-to-ice all tournaments lake wide
- Don't establish a 10 year plan on 1 year experiences
- Use reservoir elevation to determine number of all tournaments
- No weigh-in tournaments unless mortality can be decreased
- Use of more oxygen, tanks, near shoreline
- Cameras closer to release site
- Tournaments should have 40% mortality rate or less
- FWP monitor environment of fish to preclude mortality
- Reduce Northern limit to 5 fish

- Attempt to protect large female Northern and Walleye spawners

Written Public Comments 1-22-01.
(17 individuals)
(No. Of similar comments)

- Weigh-in type tournaments are unacceptable and should be banned (10)
- Fish caught in tournaments should be measured (at check boats) and released immediately (6)
- Recommend present number of tournaments be reduced (5)
- Slot limits should be imposed on walleye and northern tournament participants (4)
- No tournaments on holiday weekends (2)
- No tournaments should be allowed on Ft. Peck (2)
- No additional tournaments should be allowed on Ft. Peck (2)
- Tournaments should be held at different times of year (cool months) (2)
- Limit the number of fishing guides on Fort Peck, and number of boats any guide can operate (2)
- FWP should stock more game fish (walleye) (2)
- Number of tournaments should be dictated solely by biological impacts, not by social impacts (1)
- Tournaments have important economic effect on small communities surrounding reservoir (1)
- Tournaments should allow no more than 3 fish in live-well at any given time (1)
- No fishing guides should be allowed on Fort Peck Reservoir (1)
- FWP should impose slot limit in general regulations to protect trophy fish (1)
- FWP should stock 1 million northern pike annually, and double this in years when recruitment is negligible (1)
- FWP should stock more forage fish (cisco) (1)
- No more access roads to lake, no more boat ramps (1)
- Fishing regulations should limit daily catch to one trophy fish (walleye) above 10 lbs. (1)
- Fishing regulations should not allow any fish (walleye) to be kept by anglers less than 14 inches long (1)

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENTS ON DRAFT
FORT PECK FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN

Background Information:
Written public comment was solicited on the first draft of the revised management plan for a period of one month from May 7 to June 8, 2001. Draft plans were mailed to all attendees of previous public issue scoping meetings, those who had provided written comments regarding issue scoping, individuals listed on regional fisheries cooperators list, individuals who requested

draft plans via phone or in writing, and to the interested public at large by sending copies to all FWP regional headquarters. Comment forms were attached to each draft plan to provide an accurate and efficient method of summarizing public input. A total of 75 original forms were received out of 410 distributed. Nine individuals chose to comment by letter, and 15 by form letter.

Management Program for Walleye:
(Percent of respondents to any given topic are in parenthesis.)

1) Continue to place the major management effort on walleye.

Agree 68 (92) Disagree 6 (8) No Opinion 0

2) Strive to maintain and improve the current catch rate of approximately 0.27 fish per hour and the present average size of 2.2 lbs.

Agree 45 (63) Disagree 25 (36) No Opinion 1 (1)

3) Strive to maintain annual stocking of 2.0 million fingerlings and up to 30 million fry. Incrementally stock more fingerlings when Fort Peck Hatchery comes on line. Consideration of forage fish abundance, condition factors and relative weight of walleye will be made to determine maximum number of walleye fingerlings and fry to be stocked annually. (If conditions are favorable, up to 15.0% increase in fingerling stocking will occur followed by a three-four year evaluation)

Agree 45 (63) Disagree 26 (36) No Opinion 1 (1)

4) Continue the daily limit of 5 fish and the 10 fish possession limit.

Agree 62 (86) Disagree 9 (13) No Opinion 1 (1)

Comments Pertaining to Walleye Program:

(4) Walleye should be number 1 priority.
(1) Want to see Fort Peck as the number 1 Walleye capital in the Country.
(1) Too much emphasis is placed on Walleye given the difficult natural reproduction. Need a balance between all the game fish.
(1) #1 fish of choice by anglers (80%). What is the catch rate for the other fisheries? Is 80% of your time and money spent on the fish of choice?
(1) What is the introduction of all these walleye doing to the native fish, such as Paddlefish? Are we ruining one fishery to create another?
(1) Based on the previous creel about 1990 with a take of 45 to 50 thousand walleye, I doubt that the current creel exceeds 200 thousand at the most. From a layman's view with less than one in thousand fry surviving to creel anything done to make that two or four per thousand would do wonders.
(2) Catch rate should be at least 1 fish per hour.
(1) Average size needn't be that large if catching more fish.
(15) .27 per hour is too low.
(2) Remove wording "maintain and"
(1) Need to improve stocking to improve catch rate.
(1) Need better tools to manage lake, such as machine that determines if fray has been put in a dye.
(2) More fingerlings/less fry.
(4) More fingerlings.
(3) It has been proven that fingerlings are basically worthless.
(2) Why build a new hatchery if that's all the fish that are going to be planted.
(2) Raise the 15% increase in fingerling stockings.
(1) Is there a way to see if the fry plant is a total waste? With 30 million fry and 2 million fingerlings perhaps fry are not surviving.

(1) Stocking of fingerlings should be in the 4-5 million for 3-4 years.
(4) Increase stocking of both fingerlings and fry.
(1) Reducing fingerling stocking would be totally unacceptable.
(1) Why maintain current stocking levels when lake is more fished in the state.
(1) At least half of the eggs taken from Nelson should be return to Big Dry Arm.
(1) First consideration is health of the system.
(2) On number 3, remove entire last sentence pertaining to 15%.
(1) Need to add a number 5 saying that the plan will be adjusted with construction of new hatchery.
(1) Decrease daily limit to maintain quality walleye fishing in the future.
(13) Need a slot limit in place to protect the spawners.
- (1) 1 fish over 24"
- (1) 1 fish over 28"
- (4) 1 fish over 27"
- (1) 1 fish over 25"
- (1) 16" minimum state wide
- (1) 1 fish over 22"
- (10) slot limit Jan. 1 thru May 31

(1) It is obscene to have the current limit.
(2) Walleye fishing before May 15 should be catch and release only, or until spawn is done.
(1) Limit should be 10 daily/2 times possession limit.
(1) Limit should be 4 daily/8 possession
(1) Encourage catch and release of spawning size fish.
(1) If more fishing pressure occurs perhaps drop the daily limit depending on creel counts and success rates.
(1) If more fishing pressure occurs perhaps drop the daily limit depending on creel counts and success rates.
(1) Are increasing weed beds in dry arm where water is 20-30 ft deep playing a part in the plan of forage fish vs. walleye population?
(1) Decrease of forage fish with low water should be addressed, plant these fish in low water years.
(1) Keep up the good work.
(1) Biologist should use factual evidence from other states.
(1) Consider forage base, conditions, relative weight of walleye and desire increase to catch rate will be made to determine annual stocking.

Management Program for Sauger:

1) The sauger population in Fort Peck Reservoir is dependent wholly on natural reproduction in the Missouri River upstream, and no stocking is planned or recommended in the Reservoir.

   This item requires no comment.

2) Continue the daily limit of 5 fish and 10 fish possession limit unless the sauger population in the Missouri River upstream declines further, in which case, reduced limit will be considered.

   Agree 32 (43) Disagree 42 (56) No Opinion 1 (1)

Comments Pertaining to Sauger Program:
(6) Reduce daily limit to 3 daily/6 possession.
(3) 2 fish per day/1 over 24".
(1) 2 daily/4 possession.
(1) Limit should be 1 fish per day.
(8) Lower the limit.
(1) 1 sauger under 17".

(1) 1 over 26".
(1) Why is possession limit different from walleye when identification is a problem for many or most fishermen?
(1) Should be catch and release until numbers are back up.
(1) Catch and release only when sauger are staging-Nov. thru May.
(1) Stop the harvest of sauger now.
(1) Lowering the limit would get people to pay attention to the difference between sauger and walleye.
(1) The limit isn't the issue, the habitat is.
(15) Implement reservoir stocking.
(1) Stock when Fort Peck Hatchery is built.
(1) Concentrate on fingerling production.
(1) Forget fry planting, stock fingerling only in the reservoir and river.
(1) Allow the catching of sauger at true catch & release tournaments.
(2) Sauger needs to be regulated.
(1) Sauger should be considered with new fish hatchery.
(1) Change the limits for everyone. Catch and Release tournaments are not your problem.
(1) Shorten the season.
(1) Close season in April and May.
(2) Make uniform regulations for sport fisherman and tournament fisherman.
(1) Natural reproduction of a native fish is very good. Do not allow to be over fished.
(1) Get these fish off the "species of special concern" list.
(1) Have only caught 2 sauger in the Big Dry Arm in 28 years of fishing Fort Peck.

Management Program for Smallmouth Bass:

1) Continue to maintain a viable smallmouth bass fishery that is primarily sustained by natural reproduction and augmented on a limited basis by supplemental stocking.

Agree 63 (84) Disagree 9 (12) No Opinion 3 (4)

2) Continue present daily and possession limit of 5 fish.

Agree 68 (91) Disagree 4 (5) No Opinion 3 (4)

Comments Pertaining to Smallmouth Program:
(1) Smallmouth are my personal favorite.
(1) May need some help in these dry years.
(2) Need more fingerling stocking.
(4) Do not support stocking.
(1) Stocking only as necessary.
(1) More interest in smallmouth fishing might relieve some of the walleye pressure.
(1) As reservoir ages will natural bank erosion lessen and weed growth increase causing additional cover for fish?
(1) I hope smallmouth fishing improves in the future.
(1) Great fish.
(2) 10 per day limit
(2) Should limit to 1 trophy size smallmouth because habitat is quite limited.
(1) 1 over 18"
(1) Rank smallmouth above lake trout and salmon as far as angler preference. Also probably easier on the forage fish than salmon or trout.
(1) Doing well on their own.
(1) Too many predator fish already.
(1) Keep up the good work on smallmouth.
(1) If stocking needed new hatchery can get involved.

(1) Smallmouth is a great fish and deserves more attention, especially because it is able to naturally reproduce and lower cost to manage.
(1) Tournaments should not be allowed while spawning females are on their beds.
(1) fun to catch.
(1) For once FWP has done something good.
(1) Good work guys.
(1) Good plan.

Management Program for Lake Trout:

1) Manage the high quality lake trout fishery with a goal of maintaining the average size of fish at, or above, 7 pounds, and a catch rate of 0.15 and 0.10 for spring and fall, respectively.

Agree 62 (83) Disagree 3 (4) No Opinion 10 (13)

2) Conduct spring and fall creel surveys when possible to monitor catch rate, condition factors, and average size of lake trout. In years when FWP staff cannot creel, a volunteer creel should be implemented as a method to obtain catch and harvest numbers, and length and weight data.

Agree 62 (84) Disagree 2 (3) No Opinion 10 (13)

3) Conduct supplemental stocking of lake trout if future surveys indicate need, or lake elevations dewater the majority of suitable spawning habitat. Stocked fish will be marked to determine their contribution to the fishery and may also provide a population abundance index.

Agree 60 (80) Disagree 3 (4) No Opinion 12 (16)

4) Continue present daily and possession limit of 3 fish, barring any significant decline in present angler catch rates, or extended period of drought exceeding 3 years.

Agree 55 (76) Disagree 7 (10) No Opinion 10 (14)

Comments pertaining to Lake Trout Program:

(1) With Flat Head gone to Bull Trout, Fort Peck should have major emphasis on Lake Trout.
(1) Can Marina operators be used and volunteers at ramps help?
(2) If volunteer creel can be done on lake trout, why not walleye?
(1) Volunteer creels tend to be biased since successful fishermen are more likely to respond.
(1) Yearly mail surveys?
(1) Log book and survey box for better count.
(3) Increase stocking.
(1) Too many now, no stocking.
(3) The possession rate is too low.
    (1) 5 fish limit
    (1) 6 fish limit
    (1) 8 daily/16 possession
(3) Reduce limit.
    (1) 2 fish limit
(1) Consider a slot limit to protect the 15-20 lb fish.
(1) This is not a trout stamp, it is a warm water stamp.
(1) Lake Trout is not a family fishing activity. Too much time spent on a limited resource that only a few enjoy catching.

(1) Management plan for lake trout is very enthusiastic, carry this over to your warm water views.
(1) As long as they don't become a problem with eating walleye/bass/sauger they are fine.
(1) Allow spearing.
(1) Great game fish that makes Fort Peck more diverse.
(1) New fish hatchery for lake trout.

Management Program for Northern Pike:

1) Continue to monitor population abundance and production through annual surveys.

This item requires no comment.

2) Maintain, or slightly increase, populations through natural reproduction and limited stocking. When reservoir levels are not suitable for successful spawning, 200,000 fingerlings will be stocked annually or 1 million fry, depending on hatchery availability. Northern pike stocking will be reduced if forage fish abundance declines or abundance of other predator species dramatically increase.

Agree 53 (72) Disagree 18 (24) No Opinion 3 (4)

3) Continue present daily and possession limit of 10 fish.

Agree 55 (78) Disagree 13 (18) No Opinion 3 (4)

Comments Pertaining to Northern Pike Program:

(1) 200,000 is not enough, especially when compared to number of walleye stocked--500,000 fingerlings would be acceptable.
(1) Should stock 1,000,000 fingerlings on years when natural reproduction is reduced due to dewatering.
(1) Double to triple stocking of fingerlings and fry.
(2) Not enough consistent stocking.
(2) Stocking only during low water years.
(8) No stocking.
(1) Doing OK on their own.
(1) Eliminate "or slightly increase" wording.
(5) Limit too high
    (3) 5 daily limit/10 possession
    (1) 6 daily limit/12 possession
(1) 10 limit is fine with a slot system of 1 over 42" and none below 25" in possession.
(1) Need a slot limit to produce trophy fishery (1 trophy size limit).
(1) Raise limit to 20
(1) Northerns are not there as in the past.
(1) Growing vegetation in big dry should support larger fishery.
(2) Northern Pike is #2, not salmon.
(1) Use Christmas Trees to give the grass like cover needed for good reproduction.
(1) Get some creel data, stop flying by the seat of your pants.
(1) When Northern Pike numbers increase other fish species decrease, be careful of the fish as it can dominate.
(1) Northerns very popular with most anglers with good opportunity to catch trophy fish.
(1) Northern are a premier predator, abundance coincides with creeks being devoid of minnows and brook trout and demise of pallid sturgeon in Missouri River Drainage.
(1) Plan does not give enough emphasis to Lake Trout. With lake trout on Flathead currently under assault anglers have only Fort Peck.

Management Program for Chinook Salmon:

1) Maintain the population at, or near, the 1989/1990 levels, and thereby continue to provide the opportunity to catch "trophy sized" fish. (Targeting a specific catch rate and average weight is presently unfeasible due to insufficient creel data)

Agree 43 (59) Disagree 20 (27) No Opinion 10 (14)

2) Pursue a reliable egg source to help achieve annual stocking of approximately 200,000 fingerlings between 3 and 4 inches or equivalent variations. Numbers of chinook salmon stocked would be contingent on cisco abundance.

Agree 43 (59) Disagree 22 (31) No Opinion 7 (10)

3) Continue working with the Tri-State Salmon group to maintain and improve the Missouri River chinook salmon population to provide each state's needs with disease-free eggs and sustain disease-free status for resident populations.

Agree 49 (69) Disagree 14 (20) No Opinion 8 (11)

4) Continue present daily and possession limit of 5 fish.

Agree 52 (73) Disagree 9 (13) No Opinion 10 (14)

Comments Pertaining to the Chinook Salmon Program:

(2) No figures are given on levels in current times.
(1) What creel data? Don't believe you have data for any fish.
(1) If salmon levels of 89 and 90 are to be implemented, there is going to have to be more emphasis put on stocking forage fish and other game fish.
(2) Historical evidence shows how walleye and cisco netting samples plummeted in the 4 years following those over large salmon plants.
(1) Why not have flexibility to increase population over 89/90 levels if lake conditions will support it.
(1) State in 1989 and 1990 none were stocked, you need to stock 200,000 minimum every year.
(1) Include a maximum of 200,000 fingerlings and include contingent on cisco and other predator populations.
(1) Increase stocking to at least 400,000 provided suitable habitat and less drought.
(7) Limit stocking.
- (4) 100,000
- (1) 80,000
- (2) 50,000

(1) Make sure salmon don't get more forage fish than the walleye do.
(1) Stocking should be based on present forage for walleye's based on our #1 fish of choice.
(1) Stocking too many for a fish with a 2 week window other than snagging.
(1) Remember 80% of anglers prefer walleye so base 20% of cisco go to salmon.
(2) No Tri-state plan should be considered.
(1) Missouri River population will destroy the other species populations.
(2) Limit too low.
- (1) 10 daily/20 possession.

(1) Lower limit to 3.
(3) Salmon die off, why limit them.
(1) Emphasize great level of stocking in hatchery is built. Could be a big economic impact for eastern Montana.
(1) I hope Fort Peck is not going to be a salmon hatchery.
(1) These will eventually get mis-guided and spawn in the Judith River and fishing will suffer.

(1) Never caught one.
(1) Discontinue salmon program, too costly for results.
(1) Expensive fish for relatively small group of fishermen.
(1) Hope to see more stable populations in the future.
(1) Need to get better egg-take or planting so there aren't "poor year" runs.
(1) Salmon are a drain on our fishery resources and need to be planted every year. Should discontinue salmon program.
(1) Time and money spent on salmon could be better spent on other species.
(1) Native fish need to come first.
(1) Really like to fish salmon is August and September.

Management Program for Fishing Tournaments:

1) A maximum of 12 open water tournaments per year, mandatory catch and release will be permitted. Preference will be given to applicants of established or traditional tournaments previously held on Fort Peck.

Agree 23 (31) Disagree 51 (68) No Opinion 1 (1)

2) Tournaments will be reviewed on an individual basis, as they have in the past, with social and biological impacts considered as well as a 30-day public review and comment period.

This item requires no comment.

3) All tournaments with weigh-in type formats will be limited to cool weather periods: May-June 15th, or after September 15th.

Agree 56 (75) Disagree 19 (25) No Opinion 0

4) No tournaments will be allowed on holiday weekends such as Memorial Day, 4th of July, or Labor Day.

Agree 70 (95) Disagree 4 (5) No Opinion 0

5) The area or boundaries of tournaments will be kept to a size that will attempt to reduce mortality caused by captured fish being hauled in live-wells over an inordinate distance and/or over an extended period.

Agree 71 (95) Disagree 4 (5) No Opinion 0

6) Only one tournament per day will be permitted to be headquartered out of any marina or boat access area.

Agree 57 (76) Disagree 18 (24) No Opinion 0

Relative to the number of annual tournaments being proposed in the draft management plan, there are:

Too Many 34 (46) Too Few 23 (31) Just Right 16 (22) No Opinion 1 (1)

Number of tournaments that should be allowed on Fort Peck Reservoir:

(3) None
(5) 3
(9) 4

(3) 5
(5) 6
(1) 7
(5) 8
(9) 10
(16) 15
(1) 17
(5) 20
(1) 50
(1) Dependent on the number of participants and time/place. Some of are minor significance.

Comments Pertaining to Tournaments:

(1) All tournaments abide by the same rules. No Exceptions.
(1) Not very sportsmen like people.
(1) All about the money.
(1) Strongly agree about maintaining water levels.
(2) Governor's Cup, Rock Creek and Hell Creek only.
(2) No more PWT.
(1) Only tournaments that follow Montana Walleye Circuit allowed.
(1) Dislike tournaments of any kind. Should have to pay sizeable fee to FWP and MT state parks.
(1) Does there have to be a tournament every weekend of the summer.
(1) Would be nice to take a child fishing and not have a tournament boat in your lap two minutes after you net a fish.
(1) Keep fishing a fun family thing to do.
(1) Don't allow big money to ruin Montana fishing.
(1) One day tournaments should not count as a full tournament.
(1) Tournaments with few contestants should not count as a tournament.
(1) FWP should not set boundaries for the # of weigh boats a tournament has.
(1) One day tournaments count as a half day tournament or 1/2 discount against the total number of allowed tournaments.
(1) While the PWT does have a place in our sport, it should conform to what we fell is the best for our fishery.
(1) One and two day tournaments with less than 50 boats are not counted against the maximum of the 15 open water tournaments per year.
(1) Will not go to Fort Peck the week before or after a tournament. Chamber of Commerce should be aware others are probably doing the same thing.
(1) Fishery should not be oriented toward community economics.
(1) The existing tournament circuit should be promoted and used to develop it's share of tourism attraction for our area. However, expansion of the process smacks of profiteering. This aspect of tournament fishing is not desirable. More is not always better. Fishing cannot always be for promotion and tourism enhancement. Expanded tournament access can only hinder and interfere.
(1) Opposed to fishing tournaments in any form.
(1) Watch the pros carefully
(3) No weigh in type tournaments.
(1) Tournament proposals are too liberal. They only commercialize the publics wildlife resources. Certain tournaments (gov. cup) has a creditable history, but proliferation of tournaments in recent years have negatively impacted the publics opportunity to enjoy the "Fort Peck Experience".
(1) September still too hot.
(1) More law enforcement at the tournaments.
(1) Only actual competitive tournaments. Remove all Ladies events from number of open water tournaments.
(1) Get specific on the type of tourney, the public does not have a clue on the non-impact tourneys, i.e. ladies rock creed, etc.

(1) Questionnaire is unfair to tournaments. Need to ask specific questions, then give public the details about the actual tournaments.
(1) Tournaments are goof or the area and promote family outings.
(8) All tournaments catch and release.
(4) No sauger should be kept.
(4) Number of tournaments should be defined by number of participants. A one day 12 team tournament can not be rated the same as the Governor's Cup. Need a class/level system.
(2) If sauger can be caught and kept by other anglers, this is singling out.
(1) We only have open water suitable for fishing tournaments for 6 months.
(2) True catch and release will not impact the sauger.
(1) It can and does get just as hot in the "cool weather periods".
(1) Tournament fishing sends the wrong message about quality fishing experience and sportsmanship.
(1) Pros should have to use the same rules as every other tournament. If they can't except that then they should stay home.
(1) Tournaments are a great economic benefit to communities around the lake.
(1) More than one tournament can be run from one place is the number of boats is limited to 150.
(1) Barbless hooks needed.
(1) Two tournaments per species.
(1) Only allow a cool weather for PWT is they want a weigh in format.
(1) Newer stile live wells should be mandatory
(1) Different species tournaments should be able to overlap.
(1) Tournaments should be determined by economic impact as well as biological impact.
(1) Social impact is not acceptable, negative input is normally louder than positive.
(1) Sauger should count in tourney's.
(1) Tournaments run as a catch and release should not have a maximum.
(1) Boundaries can be set so that there could be 3 or 4 tournaments at a time with not overlap in boundaries.
(1) Keep tournament boundaries small so that anglers can avoid tournament boats.
(1) Sauger laws should be the same for sport fishing and tournaments.
(1) The problem is not just the temperature of the water and air but the fizzing (sticking a needle type of device in the stomach of walleye to release bloat and increase liveliness at weigh-in) of walleye in the live well.
(1) No PWT unless they change weigh in method and fizzing of fish.
(1) State has done an excellent job with the management of fish. Keep up the good work.
(1) 7 walleye tournaments are enough.
(1) Tournaments no more than 2 days in length.
(1) Need to limit the "purse".
(1) Bass tournaments maintain the lowest fish mortality rate nation wide due to their high requirements for care of bass in live wells. Bass tournaments cannot be compared to walleye tournaments. Bass tournaments penalize for any dead fish.
(1) Consider each tournament on it's own merit.
(1) Need to develop and follow statewide rules to be followed.

Other Comments:

(1) What happened to Ling? Are the salmon eating them?
(6) Need more forage fish planted.
(1) Fort Peck is a jewel! We have to maintain it at the proper fish levels.
(2) All through the document is the word maintain. I hope you are not afraid to improve.
(1) FWP survey's are not accurate.
(1) Trophy fish attract the wrong crowd.
(1) Who are you going to make your lake level recommendations to?
(1) Improve forage abundance and diversity by making annual water level recommendations that are favorable for the natural reproduction.

(1) Need to consider a different type of forage fish. Can't depend on ice cover for cisco to reproduce.
(1) Have you considered forage fish in the new hatchery.
(1) Not enough mentioned about importance of forage base or how to enhance it.
(1) Structure plants, no matter how small, would have a positive effect.
(1) Should be an effort in enhancing structure plantings in deeper water to help with recruitment in low water years
(1)You are singling out 1 group (tourney fishermen) and making them look like the bad guys.
(1) Fort Peck is a very under utilized resource.
(1) If sauger are a concern should reduce limits.
(1) The plan should provide parity in terms of money, manpower, and management expertise between cool water fisheries and trout management.

Also received as public comment were 15 pre-set forms stating support for fishing tournaments which has spaces for people to write their reasons for support.

Comments: (12) Local economies benefit.
(1) Chance to fish competitively with children.
(4) Promotes catch and release.
(1) Provides sponsors opportunity to come to Montana.
(1) Good time for all participants.
(1) Least taxed resource in Montana.
(1) Brings people into Montana.
(1) Great opportunity to get sportsmen together and talk about the environment.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT ON 2ND DRAFT
FORT PECK FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN
MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS (FWP)
GLASGOW, MONTANA

A second round of public input was requested for comment on a second draft of the Fort Peck Fisheries Management Plan. These public comments have been received, reviewed and will be incorporated into a Final Plan. This Final Plan will be sent to the FWP director for signature in February 2002.

Response

155 surveys were received
12 letters and e-mails were received

Thus 167 individuals commented and/or responded to the FWP 2nd draft survey instrument.

In addition, ninety-three (93) surveys with photocopied responses and comments were received (see Addendum one).

Finally, Walleyes Unlimited created a handout entitled, "Here's Your Chance to Help Shape the Future". In this form they asked individuals to respond to three items: 1) the establishment of a

0.50 fish per hour catch rate, 2) the stocking of 5.6 million fingerlings per year, and 3) the elimination on the number of tournaments held. Individuals were asked to "vote" for either the FWP position or the WU position. There were a total of 433 people who completed the WU form (see Addendum two).

Findings

In general, the public strongly want fishing at Fort Peck to improve, specifically, in terms of catch rate. While there were very few comments about the quality of the fish, the majority of the respondents stressed that last summer (2001) was very poor as witnessed by their own personal experience and by the results of tournament fishing. The public is both concerned, and frustrated by the poor fishing at Fort Peck. In addition to the immediate effects on their own fishing experience, the public is acutely aware of the resulting economic effects on the surrounding communities.

In response to poor catch rates, the public strongly felt that there needs to be an increase in stocking. While Walleyes Unlimited suggested a number of 5.67 million fingerlings a year, in general you could say that the public wants FWP to increase stocking to whatever level is necessary and effective to increase the overall success rate.

Finally, while Walleyes Unlimited did suggest that FWP eliminate a ceiling on the number of tournaments, finding reflect that there are other concerns about tournaments. There are those who are concerned about fish kill and tournament size. Still others feel that the frequency of tournaments affects the quality of the fishing experience at Fort Peck for non-tournament anglers.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT ON 2ND DRAFT FORT PECK FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PLAN (includes a summary of comments)

Background Information: Written public comment was first solicited for a one month period in May 2001. A total of 410 surveys was distributed. In response, 75 original forms were returned as well as nine comment letters and 15 form letters (99 respondents). While there was a general consensus on a majority of the issues covered, some topics required further comment as there were changes made to the plan in response to public input. A second draft fisheries management plan was sent out for comment on September 20, 2001. Eight hundred (800) surveys were printed and 725 were sent out to regional offices throughout the state, to the Helena director=s office, front desk and fisheries division as was as Walleyes Unlimited and interested anglers. In response, 155 surveys were received prior to and including an October 19 postmark deadline. In addition, 12 letters and e-mails were received. Comments from these have been incorporated into this analysis.

Management Program for Walleye:

92% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.

63% of the first draft respondents agreed; notwithstanding, Advisory Committee recommended change due to continued controversy.

Strive to improve the current catch rate of approximately 0.27 fish per hour.

(Please refer to item 2 on page 11 in draft)

Agree 34 (21.9%) Disagree 120 (77.4%) No opinion 0 No response indicated 1

63% of the first draft respondents agreed; notwithstanding, Advisory Committee recommended change due to continued controversy.

Strive to maintain annual stocking of 2.0 million fingerlings and up to 30 million fry. Incrementally stock more fingerlings when Fort Peck hatchery comes on line. Consideration of forage fish abundance, condition factors and relative weight of walleye will be made to determine maximum number of walleye fingerlings and fry to be stocked annually. (If conditions are favorable, up to 15.0% increase in fingerlings stocking will occur followed by a three-four year evaluation).
(Please refer to item 3 on page 11 in draft)

Agree 20 (12.9%) Disagree 132 (85.2%) No opinion 0 No response indicated 3

86% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.

Other Comments made pertaining to Walleye Program:

(88) Improve the catch rate to 0.5 fish per hour.
(26) Change from every 4 years to annual evaluations
(26) Stock 5.6 million fingerlings per year.
(24) Stock 5 million fingerlings per year
(20) Increase the stocking rate/plant more fish (no number specified)
(15) Don=t stock fry/planting fry doesn=t work.
(13) Double the number of fish stocked/(2.6x2=5.2)
(12) Use tournament data to estimate catch rate
(11) 0.27 is an unacceptable catch rate
(7) I don=t believe that the current catch rate is 0.27 fish per hour/data wrong
(5) Use every resource available to stock more fish/ purchase from other states
(4) Stock 5 to 6 million
(3) With a new hatchery, why would you only increase from 2 million to 2.6 million?
(2) Fishermen want more fish in their live well then catching that Big one!
(2) Eliminate the number limit of tournaments to the discretion of the Regional Fisheries Manager based on social, biological and economic impact.
(2) We need to have the chance to catch a big one now and then.
(2) I wouldn=t stock any Northern Pike as they are also predators of walleye fish.
(2) You many have to use a slot limit, works elsewhere.
(2) Probably change daily limit to 3 and 6.
(1) Why don=t you let us comment on #1 for sauger - stock some in Fort Peck.
(1) Change stocking rate to 10 times the number of fingerlings - improved survival rates.
(1) Too many fish can eliminate the current abundant trophy fishery.
(1) Daily limit should be changed to allow only 1 fish over 26" as part of your daily limit.
(1) Enhance the forage base - look at a better shoreline forage fish /plant more perch for forage.
(1) When planting fish in Ft. Peck I think you need to distribute them in different areas.
(1) Sometimes sacrifices have to be made to satisfy the public.
(1) Don=t set a figure until hatchery comes on line.
(1) I am sick of going fishing at Fort Peck for hours and not catching fish any more.
(1) Question present ability to output larger planting sizes. Fish stocked in Fort Peck Lake (walleye for example) would have to have a better chance to survive than fish in a small pond that freezes out

every year. How many of these ponds are stocked with 5" or 6" fish each year knowing they won=t survive.
(1) I would like to see the FWP take care of the whole ecosystem placing emphasis on natural species placing a balance with the exception being walleye and northern pike. Forget the rest! I would like to catch a fish every couple of hours versus now every other month!
(1) A greater need for fish hatchery and a greater number of walleye fingerlings planted. When hatchery comes on line increase their fingerlings form 2.6 million by 50% Make annual evaluation.
(1) Need more 14 inch or larger fish.
(1) Implement a rule - no fish under 14 inches kept.
(1) What are the questions to argue over or to agree on . You seem to already have your own opinion and answers.
(1) Don=t cut back on the stocking of predators.
(1) Continue the daily limit of 5 fish and 10 fish possession limit.
(1) Too many male fish are taken at tournaments.
(1) More creel checks.

Management Program for Sauger :

The sauger population in Fort Peck Reservoir is dependent wholly on natural reproduction in the Missouri River upstream, and no stocking is planned ore recommended in the Reservoir. This item requires no comment.

Item 2 was changed from 1st draft as 56% of the first draft respondents disagreed.

Continue the daily limit of 5 fish and 10 fish possession limit unless the sauger population in the Missouri River upstream declines further, in which case, reduced limit will be considered.

Agree 64 (60.6%) Disagree 38 (24.5%) No opinion 5 (3.2%) No response indicated 18

Other comments pertaining to the Sauger program:

(14) Manage Fort Peck Lake, the river is a different system.
(7) Stock sauger in Fort Peck.
(4) Question FWP=s ability to manage sauger given current walleye situation.
(3) Stock the river(s)
(3) Sauger have been managed poorly in the past
(2) With sauger decline, I think a zero daily possession limit is called for.
(2)Would like to see the sauger population improved.
(2) Change to annual evaluation of sauger.
(1) Good - This needs to be done.
(1) Stop the pumping of thousand of saugers from the Yellowstone that=s the real problem.
(1) Sauger is on species of concern list! Walleyes unlimited tries to police this.
(1) If you are not going to manage them why manage us.
(1) I would like the sauger limit to be set at 3.
(1) Stocking more fingerlings and a reduced limit to 1 fish.
(1) We would hope that you have not lowered the number of sauger in the lake so that we have to put a limit.
(1) We had better look at finding pure strain of sauger and get prepared to do some planning, before they get listed.
(1) How can the general public tell the difference between a true sauger and a saugeye. It is difficult for trained biologists.

Management Program for Smallmouth Bass:

84% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
91% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.

Management Program for Lake Trout:

83% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
84% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
80% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
76% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
Management Program for Northern Pike:

This required no comment.
72% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
78% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.

Management Program for Chinook Salmon:

59% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
59% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
69% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
73% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.

Management Program for Fishing Tournaments:

1) 68% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.

Note: First draft respondents indicated that the number of tournaments being proposed (12)...
A*too many*≅.....46%
A*just right*≅.....22% Hence, 68% felt that the ceiling of 12 should not be exceeded
A*too few*≅.....31%

2) 75% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
3) 95% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
4) 95% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.
5) 76% of the first draft respondents agreed, no changes made.

Number of tournaments that should be allowed on Fort Peck Reservoir:
63% of the first draft respondents indicated that a ceiling of 10 or fewer tournaments should be imposed.

Note: The Advisory committee after reviewing this item, felt that small tournaments should not be included in the proposed 12 tournament ceiling. As a compromise, the maximum number **was not changed** and the issue of small tournaments will be addressed under the Administrative Rules of Montana.

Additional angler preference question:

In any aquatic ecosystem an increase in predators means a reduction in forage or prey species. In Fort Peck Reservoir a significant increase in walleye stocking will likely result in a decline in the average size caught by angers, particularly if abundance of forage fish is stable or declines. During the reservoir-wide creel in 1997, the average walleye catch rate was 0.27 fish/hour. Creeled anglers reported that this catch rate was satisfactory. In 2001, FWP did not have resources to conduct a lake-wide creel, but the annual catch rate is assumed to be lower, based on anecdotal information provided by angers. (The annual gill-net survey conducted in 2001 indicated that the abundance of the walleye population was slightly above normal).

Considering the above state, are you willing to potentially catch smaller walleye to increase the number of walleye you presently catch in Ft. Peck? (Average size of angler harvested walleye during the most recent reservoir-wide creel, 1997 was 2.2 lbs).

Agree 125 (80.6%) Disagree 12 (7.4%) No Opinion 1 (0.6%) No response indicated 17

Other comments made pertaining to additional angler preference question:

(48) Do not limit tournaments - it is up to FWP to decide if a tourney is okay or not.
(17) Use tournament data to supplement FWP data e.g., harvest ratio
(15) Catch and release tournaments should not be limited to a certain number.
(14) FWP needs to define more clearly what qualifies as a tournament
(13) More smaller fish would be better/do not manage Fort Peck to be a trophy lake
(10) FWP should manage bait/forage/prey populations
(10) Need to improve fishery for economic impacts on surrounding area
(8) FWP doing a poor job/badly managing the lake
(8) Plant more fingerlings
(7) The data is questionable/I don=t believe the current catch rate is 0.27
(6) 12 tournaments is enough!
(5) Stock more fish
(5) Allow Catch and Release tournaments only/ No harvest tournaments
(4) Too many tournaments!
(4) Study their North Dakota management practice, as it surely seems to be working
(4) I would like to catch more fish.
(3) This survey is very confusing and hard to respond to.
(2) I would rather catch one trophy fish than 5 small ones.
(2) There could be more tournaments as long as they weren=t large tournaments.
(2) Annual evaluation
(2) If you cannot raise enough stock - buy it from somewhere else.
(1) Time will increase the sizes (of fish caught)
(1) I am a pike fisherman like to see 5 daily limit with a slot system
(1) Let=s try and get our fair share of money for operations in Region 6.
(1) Plant more northern pike!
(1) Define Asignificant increase≅ in stocking.
(1) It seems like the tournament ceiling has been given a huge loophole. It sounds like we may look forward to tournaments all the time.
(1) I still believe daily creel and possession limits will hurt walleye population.
(1) Plant at least 10,000 chinook salmon a year.
(1) If you stuck to planting fingerlings not fry then I would agree. Because you would see more two pound fish and there would be no need to keep 7,8, and up fish with the exception of a mounter.
(1) Re chinook salmon - like to see this go to 3 fish.
(1) Management plan until 2012 period is too long.
(1) Population for Lake trout is probably high enough or too high.
(1) Additional stocking of northern pike not necessary at this time.
(1) Salmon numbers are probably high also.
(1) I don=t believe the fish you say are going to deplete the forage are even here any more.

(1) Pressure the Crop of Engineers to maintain proper water levels.

(1) Overall draft is an excellent history and thoughtful plan except tell Aadditional angler preference Questions≅
(1) The pre-fishing before tournaments is where most of the fish are lost, if you don=t agree drive around the campground the week before the tournament.
(1) Chinook salmon stocking is appropriate.
(1) I support the revised management plan as written.
(1) Plan is well written.
(1) FWP favors trout fishermen and Western part of the state.

Addendum one
Photocopied Pink Survey Results

One hundred (100) pink 2nd draft Fort Peck Fisheries Management Plan surveys were turned into the FWP office on Friday, October 19. These surveys were identical in that all of the forms had the responses circled and comments entered leaving only the signature line to be filled in by respondents. Ninety-three (93) names and addresses were obtained from these surveys, six (6) contained names and/or addresses that were illegible, and one (1) survey was thrown out as it contained a false signature.

The comments and responses from this instrument are as follows:

Refer to management program for walleye

1) Disagree
2) Disagree

Other Comments:

#2 Work to improve the catch rate to 0.5 fish per hour based on the catch rates of all permitted tournaments on Fort Peck. This will include all fish caught over 14 inches.
#3 Recommend a goal of 5.6 million fingerlings per year starting in 2002 either by raising and/or purchasing.

Refer to management program for sauger

6) Agree

Other Comments:

I agree with limiting on the Missouri River but disagree with Fort Peck Lake.

Refer to management program for fishing tournaments

#1 Should be no limit on number of tournaments, the approval should be to the discretion of the Regional Fisheries Manager, based on biological and economic impact

#6 Allow multiple species tournaments to be headquartered at the same place

Additional angler preference question

Other Comments:

When it gets to a point that we are catching too many smaller fish then change the limit.

Addendum two
Walleyes Unlimited Survey
AHere=s Your Chance to Help Shape the Future≅

During the fall state meeting of Walleye=s Unlimited, members created a Asurvey≅ form where they asked individuals to Acast their ballot as to whether they support the position of MFWP or the recommendations of the state board of Walleyes Unlimited.≅ Individuals were asked to respond to three sections of the revised draft, and return completed forms to MFWP. These forms were very similar to requesting that an individual sign a petition. We are not certain as to the total number of forms distributed; however, we do know that they were available at many businesses.

Total Number of respondents: 433 (432 returned survey forms)
Note: 2 respondents signed their name on one form; we assumed they shared the same opinion and counted them as if they had filled out 2 separate forms.

The responses and comments are as follows:

#1 Strive to improve the current catch rate of 0.27 fish per hour (1997 creel survey). (Note that significant increases in game fish abundance will undoubtedly result in a decline in the average size caught by anglers, particularly if abundance of forage fish are stable or declines).

> *Walleyes Unlimited recommends that MFWP work to improve catch rate of .5 fish per four, based on the catch rates of all permitted tournaments on Fort Peck. This will include all fish caught over 14".*

0 I am satisfied with the MFWP figure of .27 fish per hour.

429 I am in favor of working toward a .5 fish per hour catch rate, utilizing all permitted tournaments on Fort Peck as a creel census to determine catch rates.

3 Non-response (Nothing checked, marked, circled, etc).

#2. Strive to stock a minimum of 2.0 fingerlings and 30 million fry annually, with present hatchery resources. Until Fort Peck Hatchery comes on line, the only means of increasing walleye plans is through fry stocking, as fingerings production is already at full capacity. Therefore, until the hatchery is constructed, stocking above the 30 million fry annually will be considered when surplus fry are available and environmental conditions such as water level, prey destiny, etc. are satisfactory. Incrementally stock more fingerlings when new Fort Peck hatchery comes on line. When additional production capacity is available, and conditions are favorable, the 2.0 million annual fingerlings plants will go to 2.6 million for 4 years, with a concurrent 4-year evaluation.

Walleyes Unlimited is recommending a goal of 5.6 million fingerlings per year, based on the conversion of fry to fingerlings on a ratio of ten to one. This essentially is the proposed stocking rate as proposed in the current plan, with the conversion of fry to fingerlings survival rate. We also do not want a restriction that says the Fish, Wildlife, and Parks will wait four years to adjust the stocking rate. Adjustments to the stocking rate should be made annually with no restriction to percentage change.

24 I support the MFWP plan outlined above which supports stocking 2.0 million fingerlings under current hatchery conditions and expanding that figure to 2.6 million when the new hatchery goes on line.

405 I support Walleyes Unlimited position seeking a 5.6 million fingerlings plant per year, with annual reevaluations and adjustments.

3 Non-response (Nothing checked, marked, circled, etc).

#3. There will be a maximum of 12 open water tournaments per year; mandatory catch and release will be permitted. Preference will be given to applicants of established or traditional tournaments previously held on Fort Peck.

Walleyes Unlimited asks/wants to see the elimination on the number of tournaments, leaving the approval of tournaments to the discretion of the Regional Fisheries Manager, based on social, biological and economic impact.

19 I agree with MFWP that the number of open water tournaments on Fort Peck should be limited to 12.

410 I agree with the position of Walleyes Unlimited that restrictions on the number of tournaments would be eliminated and that tournaments should be accepted or rejected at the discretion of the Regional Fisheries Manager, based on social, biological and economic impact.

3 Non-response (Nothing checked, marked, circled, etc).

Comments indicated:

Would you please send some of your staff to N.D. so you can learn how to raise fish that can be caught on a hook.

This was probably the work year that I experience of the last 4 years for catching walleye. I did however catch more bass and large (over 10 lb.) Northern than before.

I am in favor of working toward a .5 fish per hour catch rate, utilizing all permitted tournaments on Fort Peck as a creel census to determine catch rates or NO Tournaments.

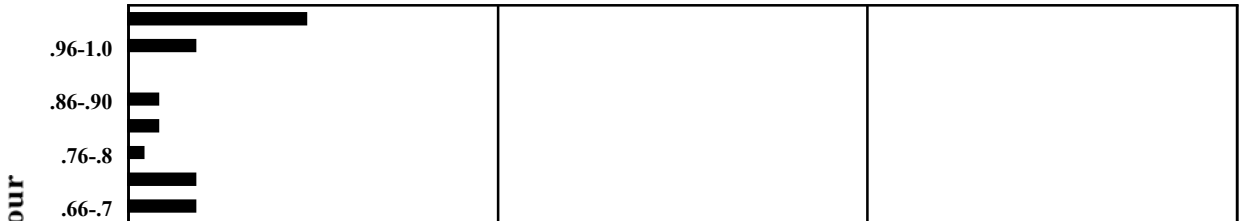
Heavy planting can only result in many small fish unless the fertility of the lake can be improved with a better food chain resulting. The shale shoreline is not a good source of vegetation so there is only a limited food chain. Proof of this is the location of walleye now in the lake - Rock Creek, Hell Creek and other areas with the more fertile shore line.

SUMMARY OF WALLEYE CATCH AND HARVEST RATES FROM OTHER WATER BODIES

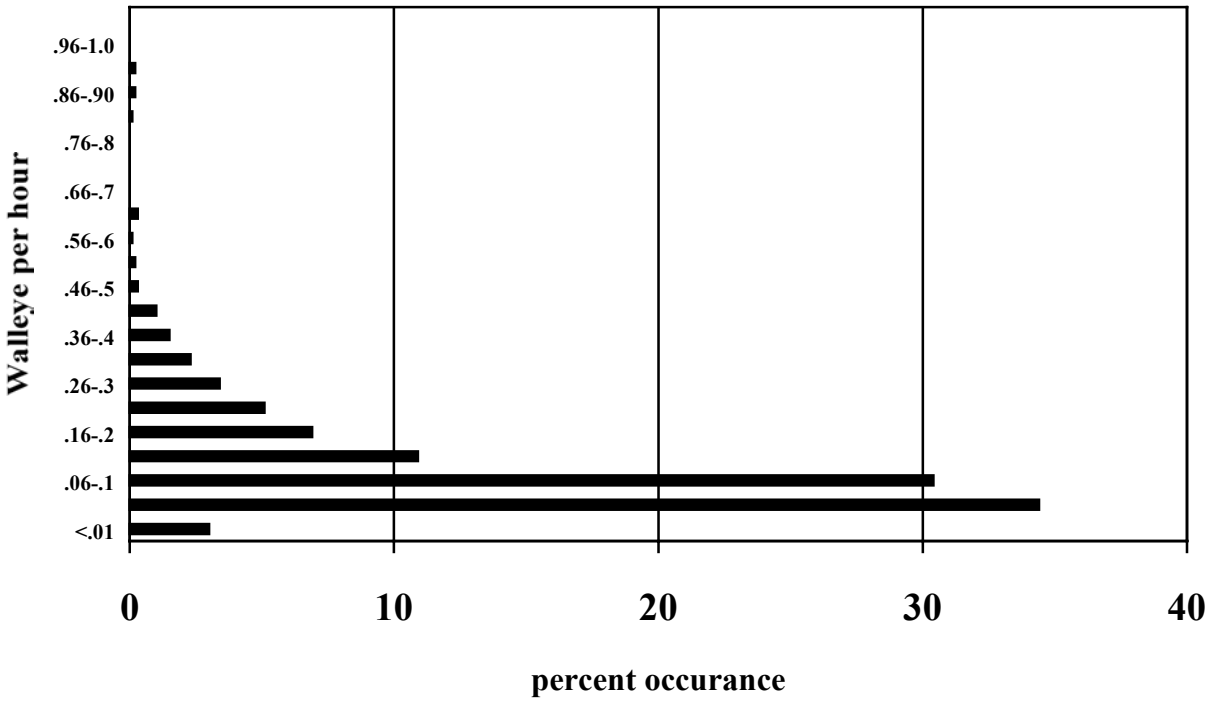
A request was placed with several states and provinces in December, 2001, to obtain angler catch and/or harvest rates of walleye in walleye waters. Information was received from Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, Saskatchewan, Alberta, South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Over 1,000 surveys conducted on walleye waters with catch or harvest rates great than 0.0 walleye per hour were used to create the table below. Walleye catch rates of .51 or greater made up only 9.9% of all surveys. Catch rates less than 0.21 made up 54.9% of all creel reports. Walleye harvest rates below 0.15 walleye per hour made up 78.7% of all surveys. Other notes received by Minnesota and Wisconsin indicated walleye waters with natural reproduction typically had higher catch rates than reservoirs that required stocking of walleye. Walleye waters with high catch rates typically had moderate or lower harvest rates which relate to smaller, less desirable size walleye.

No. Walleye Per Hour	Catch Rate Summary			Harvest Rate Summary		
	Total Surveys	Individual Percent	Cumulative Percent	Total Surveys	Individual Percent	Cumulative Percent
<.01	26	5.8	5.8	35	3.0	3.0
0.01-0.05	59	13.1	18.8	397	34.4	37.4
0.06-0.10	56	12.4	31.2	351	30.4	67.8
0.11-0.15	64	14.2	45.4	126	10.9	78.7
0.16-0.20	43	9.5	54.9	80	6.9	85.6
0.21-0.25	39	8.6	63.5	59	5.1	90.7
0.26-0.30	31	6.9	70.4	39	3.4	94.1
0.31-0.35	35	7.7	78.1	26	2.3	96.4
0.36-0.40	21	4.6	82.7	17	1.5	97.8
0.41-0.45	16	3.5	86.3	11	1.0	98.8
0.46-0.50	15	3.3	89.6	3	0.3	99.0
0.51-0.55	6	1.3	90.9	2	0.2	99.2
0.56-0.60	8	1.8	92.7	1	0.1	99.3
0.61-0.65	5	1.1	93.8	3	0.3	99.6
0.66-0.70	4	0.9	94.7	0	0.0	99.6
0.71-0.75	4	0.9	95.6	0	0.0	99.6
0.76-0.80	1	0.2	95.8	0	0.0	99.6
0.81-0.85	2	0.4	96.2	1	0.1	99.7
0.86-0.90	2	0.4	96.7	2	0.2	99.8
0.91-0.95		0.0	96.7	2	0.2	100.
0.96-1.00	4	0.9	97.6			
>1.01	11	2.4	100.			
	452			1155		

Summary of 452 creel surveys by percent of occurrence based on catch rates of walleye.



Summary of 1155 creel surveys by percent of occurrence based on harvest rates of walleye.



SUMMARY OF MANPOWER AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS FORT PECK FISHERIES PROGRAM

	ANNUAL	OPERATIONS	PERIODIC	EQUIPMEN

				T
Spring and Fall lake trout and salmon creels (site specific)	0.36 FTE			
Lab work to age lake trout and salmon, read OTC marks	0.06 FTE			$ 7,500.00
Reinstate annual lake-wide trap netting	0.031 FTE			$ 18,000.00
Contract lake-wide creel at 3 year interval				$100,000.00
Tags for walleye marking during lake-wide creels				$ 3,000.00
Replace R-7 personnel assisting with walleye egg-take	0.60 FTE			$ 7,000.00
Additional personnel critical to fall chinook salmon egg-take	0.20 FTE			$?
Additional personnel critical to chinook fingerling pen rearing	0.11 FTE			$ 3,000.00
Mark fingerling salmon with fin clips and coded wire tags	0.15 FTE			$ 5,000.00
Additional manpower for fall lake trout egg-take			0.15 FTE	
Maintain existing walleye rearing pond program	0.44 FTE			$ 5,000.00
Additional manpower for small mesh annual gill netting	0.22 FTE			
Additional manpower for adult cisco vertical gill netting	0.14 FTE			
Additional manpower for walleye rearing pond expansion	?			$?
Additional manpower for hydroacoustic sampling	0.20 FTE			$120,000.00
Additional manpower for “backfill” for more public meetings	0.10 FTE			$ 2,000.00
Add manpower to “backfill” when working with tournament directors	0.05 FTE			
Total	**2.95 FTE**		**0.15 FTE**	**$270,500.00**

Population Structure Indices Considered:

1. Proportional Stock Density (PSD)
    - Value less than 40, composition of population is mainly of small fish
    - Value between 40-60, composition of population has good balance of large and small fish
    - Value greater than 60, composition of population is mainly of large fish with few small fish

2. Young to Adult Ratio (YAR)
    - Value less than 20, population lacks sufficient recruitment
    - Value between 20-30, population is considered balanced
    - Value great than 30, population has more small fish with few large fish

FORT PECK HATCHERY

FISH PRODUCTION AND NEEDS FOR THE FUTURE

Current demand for warm water fish species has exceeded the long-term average production at the Miles City Hatchery. This has become apparent when production of

walleye, bass, and other warm water fish species exceeds long-term averages and expectation. When production exceeds expectation there has always been statewide requests to stock more fish then the original stocking request. Statewide request are based on average production capabilities at Miles City Hatchery and a balanced allocation system. Utilizing these criteria will provide sufficient numbers of warm water fish for those waters to provide acceptable fisheries.

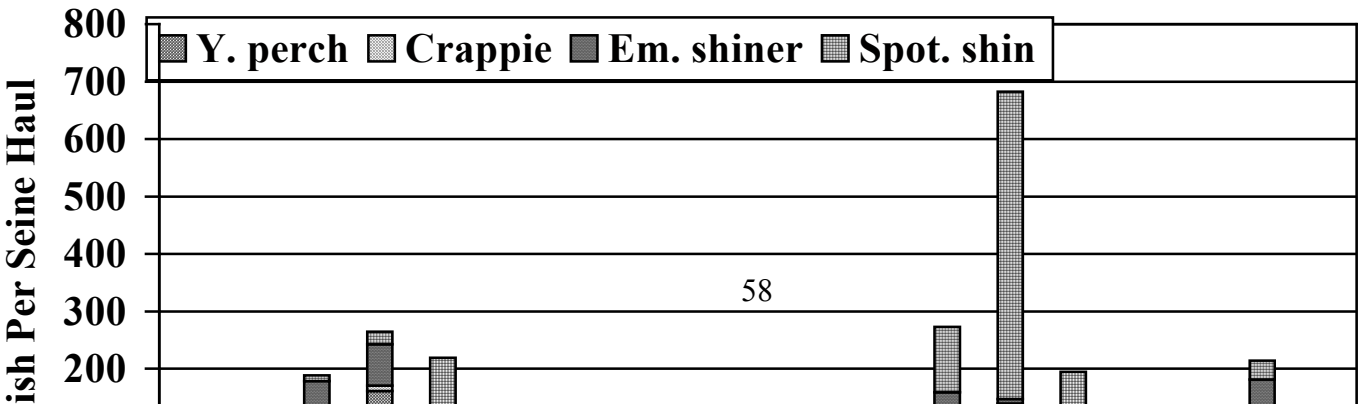
With increased demands and the inability to produce enough or the exact size fish to meet those demands state wide, it was necessary to put forth the effort to get a hatchery at Fort Peck. The production capacity for multiple species at Fort Peck will allow the Fish Wildlife & Parks to provide the numbers, sizes and variety of fish species including native fish, that managers and biologist across the state could use. Each request could be met with the exact number, size, and species at the right time to provide for the flexibility FWP's needs in quality fish management. Custom rearing to exacting needs for individual water throughout Montana could be accomplished with the addition of the Fort Peck Hatchery. Native species such as pallid sturgeon and sauger would be cultured without sacrificing sport fish production.

The hatchery will also provide space to maintain brood stocks of some warm water and native species. The addition of this production capacity will allow FWP to produce a variety of sizes and numbers of all species in combination with the Miles City Hatchery. Fish from Fort Peck Hatchery will be utilized to stock approximately but not limited to 40 waters throughout Montana.

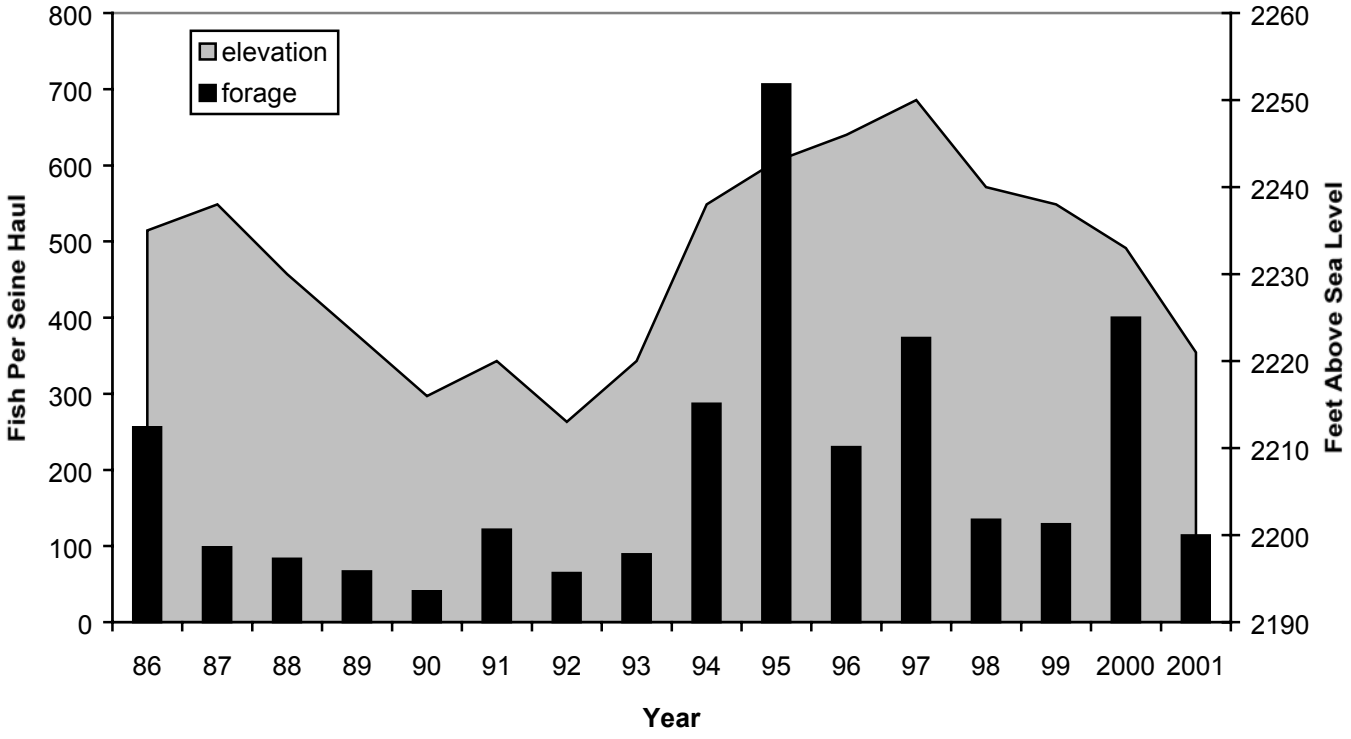
The hatchery design is setup to rear:

Walleye Fry	50,000,000	
Walleye Fingerling	2,500,000	and advanced fingerling 250,000
Sauger	2 – 3,000,000	fry and fingerling or as needed
Small Mouth Bass	70 – 80,000	fry, fingerling, and to maintain brood
Large Mouth Bass	70 – 80,000	fry, fingerling, and to maintain brood
Tiger Muskie	50 – 60,000	fingerling and advanced fingerling
Northern Pike	150 – 200,000	fry and fingerling
Channel Catfish	40 – 50,000	advanced fingerling
Sturgeon	as needed	
Chinook	300,000	smolts

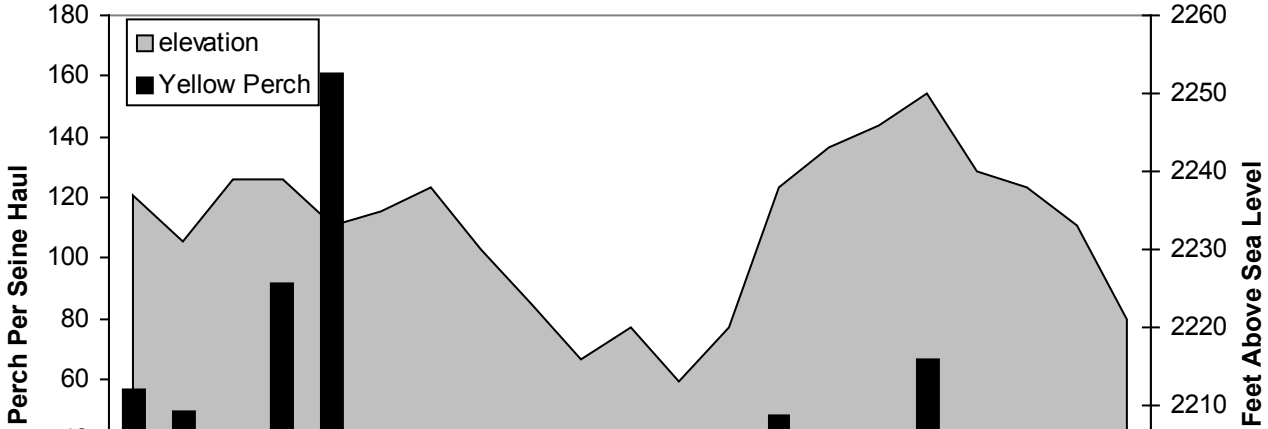
Selected forage species average catch per seine haul from annual fall surveys.



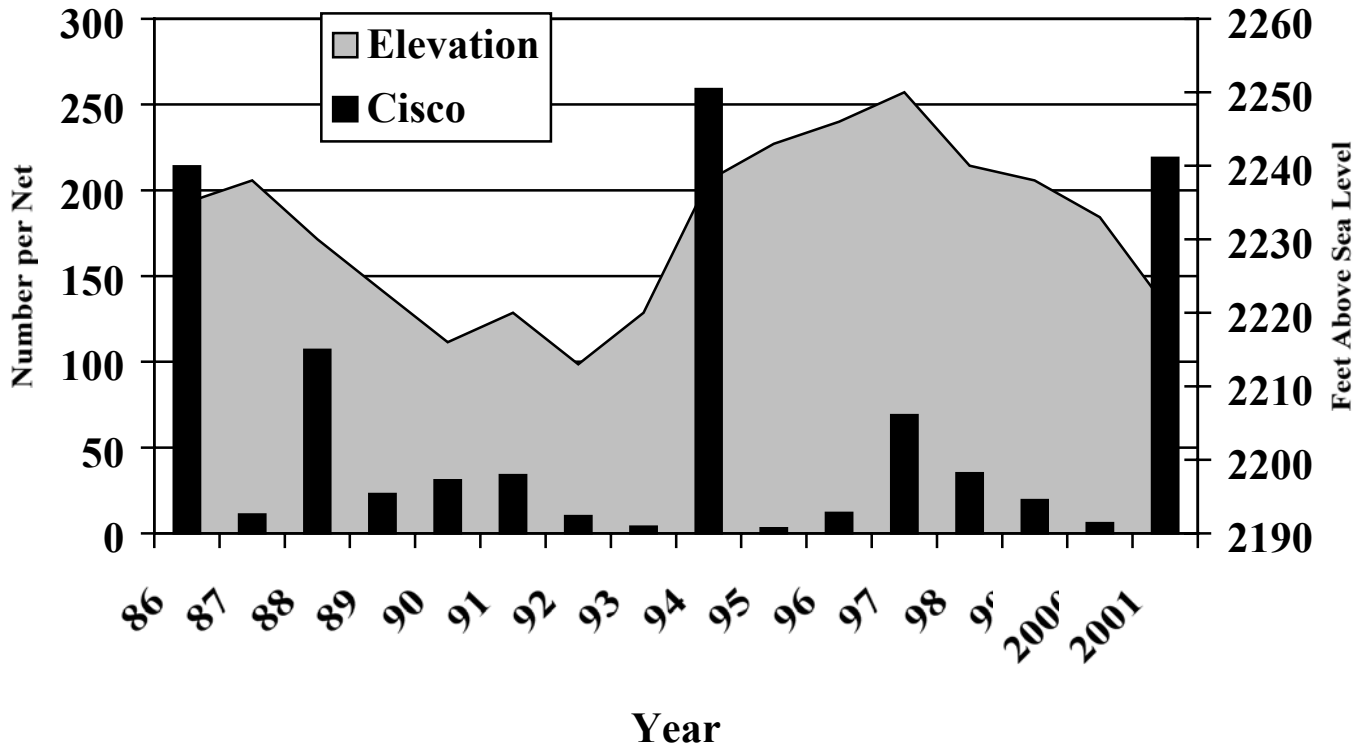
All species captured per seine haul compared to minimum June elevations annually.



Yellow perch average per seine haul annually compared to reservoir elevations.

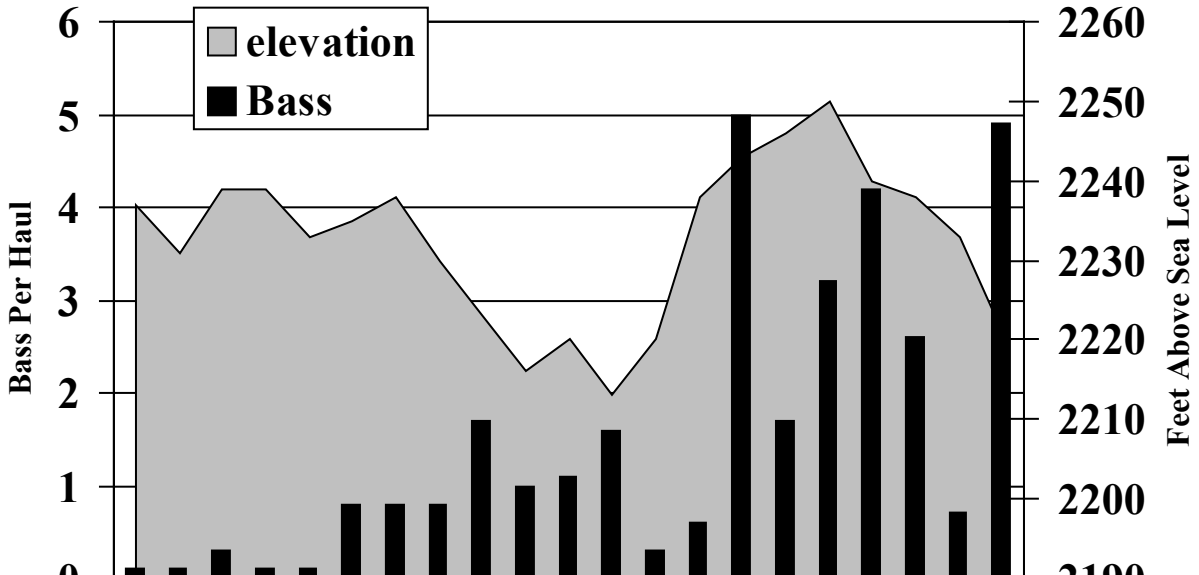


Young-of-year cisco collected per overnight gill net sets annually compared to reservoir elevations.



Average number of northern pike collected during annual gill netting compared to reservoir elevations.

Average number of young-of-year smallmouth bass captured per seine haul annually compared to reservoir elevations.



Average number of sauger collected during annual gill net surveys, Ft. Peck Res.